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Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 109 (October 2006)

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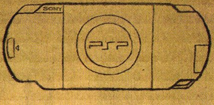

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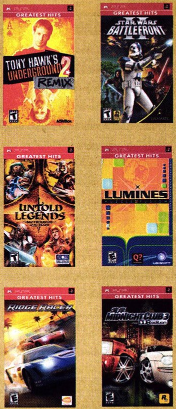
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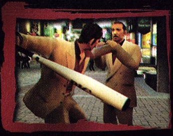

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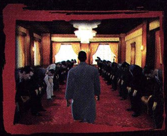

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Use of Alcohol
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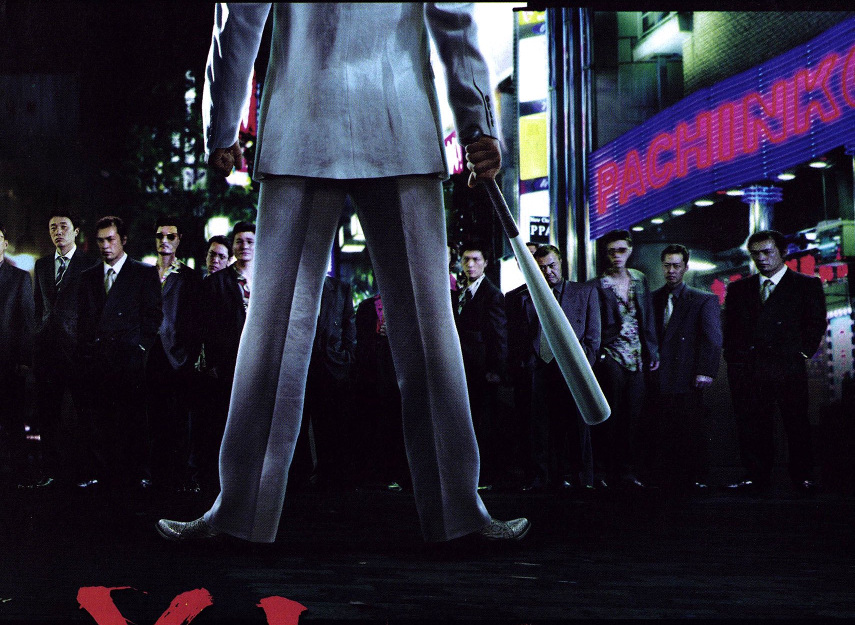
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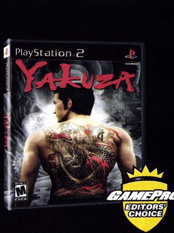
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PlayStation 2

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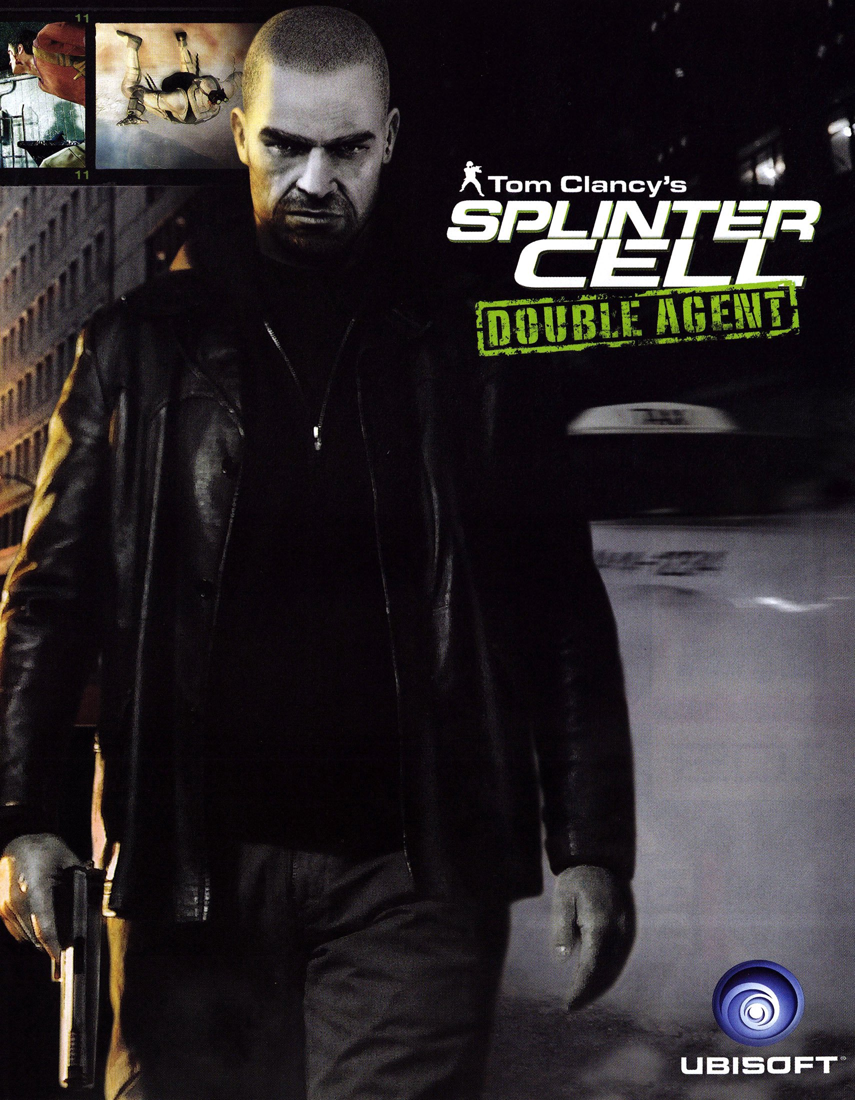

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OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE

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ARMY OF TWO

BURNOUT PS3

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BURNOUT PS3

ARMY OF TWO

COVER STORY

109.

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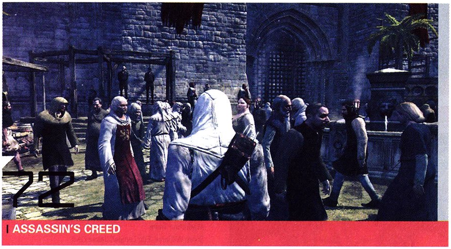
BURNOUT 5
ARMY OF TWO



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If you ran the industry, we'd probably have to quit our jobs....

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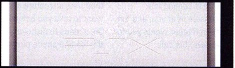

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Whatever happened to the PSX?

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It does more than just play games.

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The music of *Madden*.

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Three survival-horror series enter a room; one leaves....

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When games got mouthy.

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Farewell, E3....

OPM.1UP.COM

You like content? We've got content! In fact, opm.1UP.com is chock-full of extras that didn't fit in the issue.

Do you have a beef with EA? Drop by to read four more reasons why you may want to rethink that.

Also, read our full interviews with top developers such as Ted Price, Tetsuya Mizuguchi, Tim Schafer, and many more, and see what they think about being independent in a corporate world.

You'll also be able to view videos that have inspired Criterion as it works on the biggest, bestest *Burnout* yet.

And don't forget to stay tuned to 1UP.com on September 22 as Sony finally unveils the final PlayStation 3 details at this year's Tokyo Game Show.

So stop on by. We're waiting for you....

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#109

HUNGRY LIKE THE WOLF

One of the things we pride ourselves on is bringing you the latest and greatest demos the gaming world has to offer. That is one of the benefits of reading the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine,* which you are holding right here in your hands.

This month, we bring you a brand-new demo for *Okami.* Sample three different levels from this amazing game, including the chance to fend off an onslaught of unusual villains in Shinshu Field and the opportunity to tackle an awesome boss fight in the Curse of the Crimson Helm. Don't forget to check out the latest *One Piece* game, featuring a hybrid of 1-on-1 fighting mixed with an adventure mode. Finally, we couldn't resist putting the *Lego Star Wars II* demo on the disc once more to make sure anybody picking up the magazine at the newsstand does NOT miss out on this game!

So, what are you waiting for? Grab the disc and get to your PlayStation 2.

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
ISSUE 108
SONY

PLAY IT!

OKAMI

Haven't made up your mind about *Okami*? This new demo should convince you to hand over your hard-earned cash for this brush with greatness.

ONE PIECE: GRAND ADVENTURE

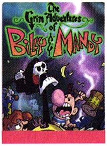
Take to the high seas in search of your pirate posse and engage in battles on your quest for treasures and adventure.

PLAY IT!

LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

OK, we confess: We could *not* get enough of this demo, and we wanted to make sure everybody had the chance to play it.

WATCH IT!


The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy

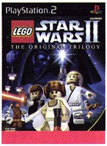
THE GRIM ADVENTURES OF BILLY & MANDY

This paranormal adventure is coming to a console near you, and the Grim Reaper wants you to answer his call.

INSIDE THE GAME: ROGUE GALAXY

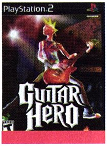
The developers of *Dark Cloud* 2 are back with their new adventure and want to take you behind the scenes to discover the life of a space pirate.

WATCH IT!



INSIDE THE GAME: LEGO STAR WARS II

LucasArts pulls the bricks apart to go in-depth with its latest game. Find out all the juicy details on what to expect in this classic trilogy.



EXTRA: GUITAR HERO SAVE GAME

We unlock the secrets of this awesome game so you can become the ultimate guitar hero! All you have to do is move it to your memory card.

COMING NEXT MONTH!

GUITAR HERO II

GUITAR HERO II

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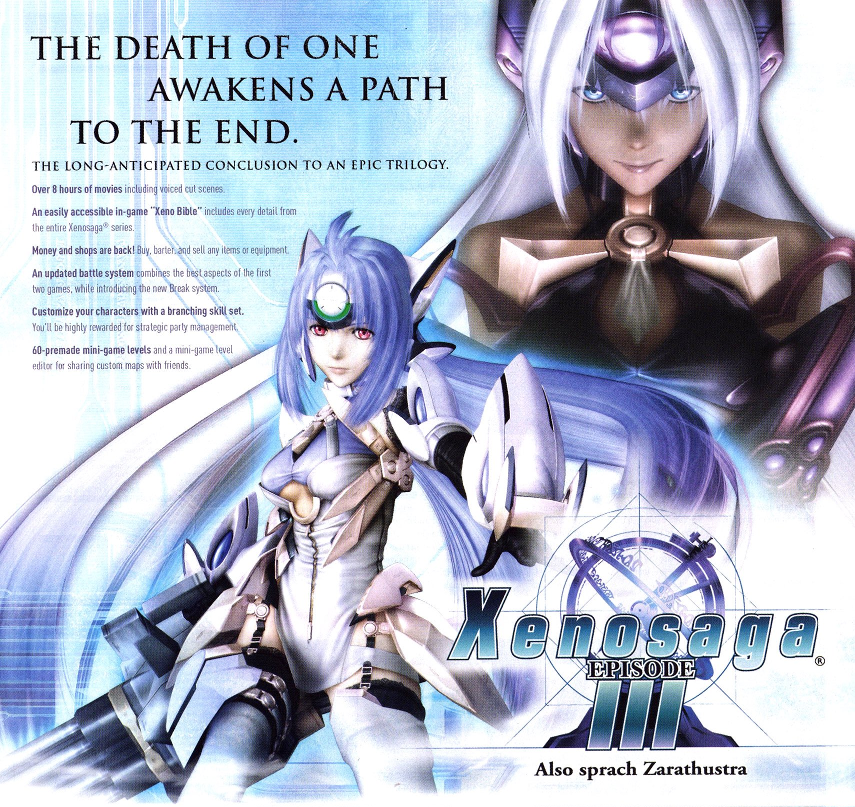

Xenosaga® EPISODE III

Also sprach Zarathustra

Wolf Fang
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Saneen HP 472 EP 24
REVENGE
Malicious Charge
E.S. Dinah HP 47059
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Mild Suggestive Themes
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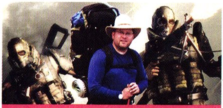


TOM BYRON

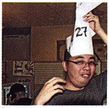
returned from a 62-mile backpacking excursion to a numbing reminder of how quickly time flies. "Holy kee-rap!!!" began Tom's memo to the *OPM* staff. "The PS3 launches November 17! THIS November 17!" The always-composed *OPM* staff slapped Tom down with a rousing rendition of the Black Eyed Peas' "Shut Up" and a reminder that there's plenty of time to pull together a rousing PS3 launch feature in the December issue. In the meantime, Tom invites *OPM* readers to double their pleasure with two awesome PS3 games from EA.

DANA JONGEWAARD

has started her campaign for the inclusion of the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile in *Burnout 5* by using the office UPS services to send a daily package stuffed with hot dogs to Criterion. She will not cease until her demands are met!

JOE RYBICKI

decided to prepare for the release of *Army of Two* by recruiting the most reliable gameplay partner that he could find: himself. The cloning project went great—now, the only question: Which one of him gets to cash his paycheck?



THIERRY NGUYEN

has been alive for about 10,000 days, and what does he have to show for it? A jaunty new hat that doesn't fit his misshapen Scoot-brain and a general disdain for fools who fail to regulate on a daily basis. Yeah, he's talking about you, Tom.

GIANCARLO VARANINI

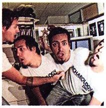
was almost too busy to write this bio because he was off screwing around with the *Virtua Fighter 4* arcade cabinet in the lobby and eating delicious-yet-deadly birthday cake. Also, yay for sleep deprivation—thanks, stupid cat.

LOGAN PARR

is discovering his "inner rave" at the moment. We're cool about the baggy pants with all those straps and spiky accessories attached, but the new hat has us baffled. But it does cover those UV-reactant hair extensions he just got, so it isn't all bad.

RYAN VULK

was forced to use this space to give a shout-out to Lithian, a fellow *FFXI* player on the Ramuh server. And now that he's followed through on his end of the bargain, he's expecting something nice and shiny in his delivery box—preferably in the form of 1 billion gil.



ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA

will have celebrated his second full year of employment at *OPM* by the time you read this. He wants to thank the rest of the staff for turning him into a crazy dirtbag faster than you can say "*God Hand.*" Thanks a lot, idiots.

EXTENDED FAMILY

PATRICK JOYNT

likes playing soccer games, but not as much as he likes downing a dozen Coronas, watching World Cup action, and crying like a baby when his team loses.
halofire.1UP.com

ROBERT ASHLEY

comes from Texas, where they grow their game reviewers tall and snarky. He also makes music in not one, but two different bands. He's multifunctional like that.
robertashley.1UP.com

GREG SEWART

hails from the same country cold comes from: Canada. He worked for *OPM*'s sister mag, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, for years before joining, and then leaving, the game-design community.
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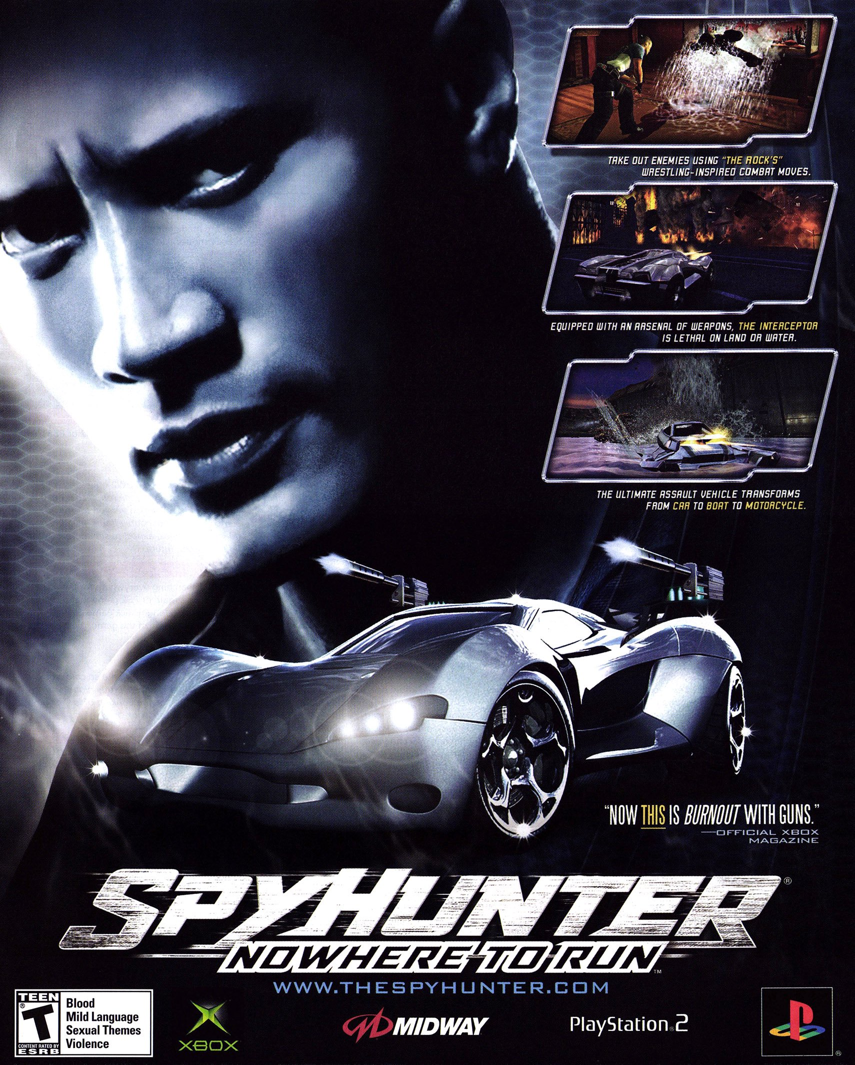

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INPUT

OUR READERS ARE CRAZY

MOSTLY UNEDITED LETTER OF THE MONTH

Hey assfaces, yous jerks should put that crazy godhand game in your next demo disc. dya kno wat i mean?\ that Godhand game. The one that';s all crazy ní s***. . u know that feeling when ui drink too much wine and you're all like " whoascrap wats happening?" well thats the feel ing I'm getting and u should put a video of Godhand s in ur next demo disc. I weiil get u \. din't underestimate the power of TEKKEN MAN! love,

Tekken Man
Via e-mail

A FRIENDLY REMINDER FROM OPM

THE PLAYSTATION 3 IS IN STORES NOVEMBER 17.

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BREAKING INTO GAMES

I'm very interested in getting into the gaming industry as a gaming journalist or a writer. I was wondering if you had any advice for people like me.

Jerry Doolin
Via e-mail

This is one of the most common questions we receive. While there's no surefire way to guarantee employment in gaming journalism, there are some things you could do that might help. Here are eight ideas:

1. Be an expert in the field. It's not only important to like games; you have to know a lot about games—and not just PlayStation, but Nintendo, Xbox, PC, GBA SP, PSP, and so on. There are people at Ziff Davis (publisher of OPM, EGM, CGW, *and 1UP.com) who are walking encyclopedias when it comes to games.*

2. Become a writer. Write a lot, have people critique your work, and take their comments seriously. Teachers, friends, family—anyone who will give you an honest opinion. Take writing classes. Hone your skills.

3. Write, write, and write! Start a gaming blog (perhaps on 1UP!). Start a local gaming fanzine or website. Write letters to the editor. Write for game fansites. The more public writing you do, the greater a credible portfolio you'll build.

4. Get to know people in the gaming business. Many gaming press have blogs (including all of the OPM *staff) or other ways to be contacted. Get to know some of them. You may find you can build a good relationship that could lead to opportunities.*

5. Check around for internships. Ziff Davis, for instance, considers college-age applicants for internships.

6. College and/or college-level writing courses or a journalism (or related) degree help, but they're not necessary. A degree does say you take a writing career seriously.

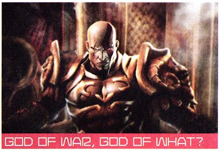
7. Be professional. Always. People pay attention to people who are reliable, knowledgeable, competent, and enthusiastic about what they do.

8. Persevere. A good attitude is essential for this—nothing's going to happen overnight, so the proper way to approach all this is through patience and perseverance.

DUDE, YOU'RE PAYING FOR THE BLOOD

In regard to your Hype featurette about overpriced goods (*OPM* #107, August 2006), I'd like to add something: At the Formula One store (f1store.formula1.com), they have mouse pads (mouse pads!) priced at over $450. OK, so they are made out of carbon fiber, but they're bloody mouse pads!

Alan O.
Via e-mail



GOD OF WAR, GOD OF WHAT?

Is *God of War II* going to be on PS2 or PS3???

Milles Lee
Via e-mail

Sony has announced GOW2 *only for the PS2. We're kinda betting on the rumor that there will be a high-resolution version for the PS3 at some point, and of course if this installment does well in sales, expect to see more* GOW *in your next-gen future.*

CALL OFF THE SEARCH

I've been searching everywhere for the giant robot mech simulator PS2 game that requires a huge multibutton-joystick game controller. If you know the name of the game, please reply.

Daniel
Via e-mail

Daniel, Daniel, Daniel: You are so cold, you could single-handedly disprove global warming. The game you are thinking of is Capcom's Steel Battalion*...on Xbox only.*

GET A JOB, CRYBABIES!

I just got the August issue of *OPM* (#107) and was appalled to see all the people crying about the price of the PS3: $500 for the cheaper or $600 for the high-end model. That is an incredible deal!

Look at what the PS3 offers. It is the only—and I am including the too-little/too-early Xbox 360 in this—console that is going to truly deliver when it comes to HD gaming; 720p is not 1080p by a long shot. Also, even the lower-end version comes with a hard drive where you can store downloaded content, pictures from your digital camera, files you create, and so on. Not only that, it gives you the ability to surf the Web and download content from the comfort of your living room—and it's a Blu-ray player to boot! That's worth nearly a grand by itself. If you have an HDTV and don't feed it HD content, what is the point?

By no stretch of the imagination am I rich, and I am the only one working to support my 4-year-old son and my wonderful gamer-girl wife, but still I see the PS3 as a deal. You who

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may just not be that interested in electronic entertainment, don't have an income, or need financial advice—all of you are forgiven. The rest of us will be happily playing *MGS 4*, *Killzone*, *MotorStorm*, and whatever the brilliant Fumito Ueda (*Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus*) and his team come up with soon enough.

PyroDD
Via e-mail

JOE SAID IT, I BELIEVE IT, THAT SETTLES IT

I have just read Joe's In My Day in Issue #107 (*OPM* August 2006) and I have to agree with him on the anti-Sony hate going around. Ever since the PS3's price was announced, everybody is either with Sony or against it and, like Joe said, trying to bring it down like a colossus. I personally don't know whether I will be asking for a PS3 or an Xbox 360 for Christmas this year, but Sony has set the standards of its system, and it's time to pick whether to go with a cheaper system or the technically superior system.

Jnb455713
Via e-mail

UMD-LICIOUS IDEA!

I have been wondering if you have considered sending out a demo UMD for the PSP in your magazine every month, or even bimonthly, or just as a one-time special. This would be greatly appreciated by the PSP-owning community. I don't know the legal or financial matters of doing this, but I do know that it would be very cool. They could contain game demos, previews, trailers for movies that will be released on UMDs, and even *OPM* videos, like E3 coverage or some behind-the-scenes things.

Paul Mark Alvarez
Via e-mail

Paul, the idea of including a UMD demo in OPM *is the sort of outside-the-box thinking we like to see around here! Make it happen! Er... we mean WE'LL make it happen. In fact, we're working on it. Seriously. Watch for something sooner than you think.*

JIBBAH-JABBAH? YOU MEAN FROM STAR WARS?

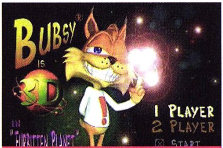
I have three words to say to the people complaining about the price of the PS3: Get a job! I've been doing three-day weeks as a dishwasher, and it took me two months to save up about $575! That's not a lot of work, especially for a 15-year-old. I know that if the PS3 is as good as the games look now, it's worth every penny. Oh, one more thing: Adults with real jobs should not even complain—they probably make about $500 in a week. Quit your jibbah-jabbah and shut up!

Bill Lipp
Via e-mail

MAKING MONEY THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY

I keep hearing the talk about how the used-game business is stealing money out of the hands of developers, and I want to point something out: You can't count money you never had as money lost. When a used car gets sold, you don't see GM or Ford throw their arms up in the air and scream, "There goes another new car we could have sold!" A sale is not a sale until you have made it. There is no guarantee that the guy who bought that used game would have paid full price for it if he hadn't found it used. The simple solution is this: Make a great game, sell it at a reasonable price, and then the profits will roll in.

Heaven67
Via e-mail


BUBSY
IS
3D
IN
"FURRITEN PLANET"
1 PLAYER
2 PLAYER
START

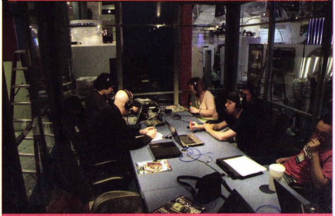
MAYBE YOU SHOULD HAVE RETURNED IT FOR A REFUND?

I was especially interested in Robert Ashley's "The Opposite of Fun" (*OPM* #107, August 2006), not because of how much I said "Huzzah!" to most of what he had to say, but because he forgot about *Bubsy 3D.* Look in awe at the less-than-stellar 3D graphics! So "less" that after I played this dumb, rushed mess of a game, I actually used the game for archery practice.

Mason Maguire
Via e-mail

RADIOPM

BEHIND THE SCENES AND BEYOND THE PAGES OF THE OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE



RADIOPM IS ON THE AIR!

radiopm.1up.com

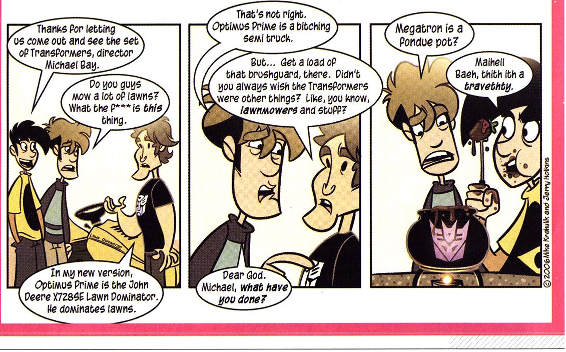
Hailed as the "best podcast on the planet" by Tom Byron, editor-in-chief of *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, **RadiOPM** continues its glorious surge through the Interwaves. Recent chats include the demise of E3, the highs and lows of *LocoRoco*, the fuss around Blu-ray, and why *GTA* may be overrated. The fun happens every Thursday at radiopm.1up.com. Also, don't forget to check out all the *OPM* editor blogs at opm.1up.com.

NCAA FOOTBALL 07 RATING CHANGE

The retail version of *NCAA Football 07* on the PSP featured some glitches with spotting the ball that weren't present in the review build. As such, we're adjusting the official score to a 7/10.

PENNY ARCADE

PENNY-ARCADE.COM


Thanks for letting us come out and see the set of Transformers, director Michael Bay.
Do you guys mow a lot of lawns? What the f*** is *this* thing.
LAWN DOMINATOR
In my new version, Optimus Prime is the John Deere X728SE Lawn Dominator. He dominates lawns.
That's not right. Optimus Prime is a bitching semi truck.
But... Get a load of that brushguard, there. Didn't you always wish the Transformers were other things? Like, you know, *lawnmowers* and stuff?
Dear God. Michael, *what have you done?*
Megatron is a fondue pot?
Maihell Baeh, thith ith a *travethty.*
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PLAYSTATION 3

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HYPE

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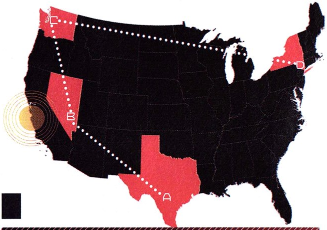


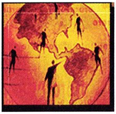
THE DEATH—AND EVENTUAL REBIRTH—OF E3

You may have heard: E3 is dead. Well, maybe not completely dead, but the trade show that once served as the flagship for the gaming industry is no more. Publishers such as Electronic Arts, Sony CEA, and plenty of other companies had grown tired of the mounting costs of attending and presenting product at the Electronic Entertainment Expo—and getting little for it in return. As such, E3 is being reorganized into a smaller event that will include fewer companies and fewer people. But it's not like this spells the end of videogame conventions. There are plenty of others waiting in the wings to grab all of the attention. Below are just a few.

E3: WHAT HAPPENED?

Too many people and too much expense—E3 became less and less about the games and more and more about the competition between companies to see who could have the biggest booth or the most ridiculous booth babes. Heck, most of the high-profile games at E3 were shown by invitation only, essentially making the whole idea of a "convention" pointless. The official line from the Entertainment Software Association—the U.S. gaming-industry trade association and the organization behind E3—is that the "new" E3 "will focus on press events and small meetings with media, retail, development, and other key sectors. While there will be opportunities for game demonstrations, E3 Expo 2007 will not feature the large trade-show environment of previous years."

MUST GO ON



A

AUSTIN GAME CONFERENCE

LOCATION: AUSTIN, TX

TIME: SEPTEMBER

WHAT WAS IT PRE-E3 MELTDOWN?

Much like the Game Developers Conference, the Austin Game Conference was created more for those involved on the business or technical sides of the industry—in AGC's case, specifically massively multiplayer online games. Though the conference has grown in recent years, the show floor still reflects the industry audience, as hardware and development-technology companies are more prominent at AGC than other conventions.

CAN IT BE THE NEW E3?

It's possible that the Austin Game Conference could become a new venue to show off games, but perhaps nothing too high profile in the early going—simply because the transition would be way to jarring. Plus, outside of keynote speakers, the general crowd that attends now isn't necessarily prepared to mingle with the press.

VERDICT:

It could be the new E3, but it's going to take awhile for the convention managers to shift gears from the current format to a more media-friendly setup.

B

CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SHOW

LOCATION: LAS VEGAS, NV

TIME: JANUARY

WHAT WAS IT PRE-E3 MELTDOWN?

CES was E3 before E3 was E3. The granddaddy of electronics trade shows was where all the big-name companies used to unveil hardware and brand-new games. Unfortunately, the organizers of the show weren't willing to promote the ever-growing gaming industry—and as a result, E3 was born.

CAN IT BE THE NEW E3?

Out of any of the current conventions, CES has the best chance of being the new E3, simply because more and more companies—including Sony—have been using CES as a venue for showcasing new, big-name products. And since games are big business these days, it seems like the CES organizers are more willing to give games the spotlight.

VERDICT:

CES has already been turning back into a big venue for videogames, but they still have to share the stage with other types of consumer electronics at the event. But if any city can support a circus like that, though, it's Las Vegas.

C

PAX (PENNY ARCADE EXPO)

LOCATION: BELLEVUE, WA

TIME: AUGUST

WHAT WAS IT PRE-E3 MELTDOWN?

The Penny Arcade Expo originally started out in 2004 as a fan-oriented show where people could come and play various videogames with each other and participate in tournaments. Since then, the show has grown tremendously and now includes high-profile speakers as well as prominent support from major videogame companies.

CAN IT BE THE NEW E3?

As already stated, one of the major problems with E3 was the huge attendance numbers. If Penny Arcade were to become the Next Big Thing, then there's a good chance that it would no longer be as community-focused, as some of the fan-oriented portions would probably be squashed in favor of booth space for major companies.

VERDICT:

We actually like PAX the way it is. It's a great place for fans to go to talk about and check out games—if it were to turn into the next E3, that would pretty much defeat its original purpose.

D

DIGITALLIFE

LOCATION: NEW YORK CITY

TIME: OCTOBER

WHAT WAS IT PRE-E3 MELTDOWN?

Ziff Davis' own DigitalLife show can best be described as a much smaller version of CES, but with a much more public-friendly slant. It's continued to grow in recent years, becoming a major point of interest for big companies due to the fact that it's a great opportunity to show products before the holiday shopping season.

CAN IT BE THE NEW E3?

While DigitalLife could definitely become an even bigger event now that E3 has "changed," it doesn't quite have the perception that CES does in terms of being a venue for unveilings or major announcements. Plus, the show's going to need more room if it's gonna be the Next Big Thing.

VERDICT:

Digital Life has a pretty good shot since it's so similar in concept to CES, but it has to do a lot of growing in a very short amount of time. It could happen, but probably not fast enough to fill the massive void left by E3.

SIDESHOW

There are plenty of other shows that have growing videogame segments. San Diego Comic-Con has become a great place for independent developers to show many of their games, but it's also been a great place for some bigger-name videogames that have huge fan communities. Toy Fair, a major toy-industry trade show in New York City, has been dealing more with videogames in recent years. And the Games Convention in Leipzig, Germany, is also rapidly growing as an international event and could potentially take over the reins. So don't fret. Even though the old E3 is going away, there are still plenty of conventions ready to pick up the slack.

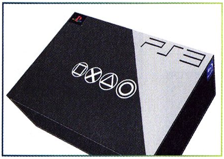
CALIFORNIA

Of course, California is still home to some great conventions such as the Game Developers Conference in San Jose, but GDC serves such a specific purpose that we would hate to see it turn into another E3. GDC has always been about the developers and the process of game creation and development—and it should stay that way. It's also entirely possible that a brand new conference will emerge to take the place of E3 and the sheer excitement that it used to generate. For now, we're all going to have to get used to the "new" E3 and see if the idea of a more intimate atmosphere totally backfires on the industry.

THE ART OF THE BOX

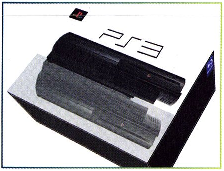
YOU DECIDE

As of press time, Sony CEA has yet to show any sort of packaging for the North American version of the PlayStation 3, so we've come up with a few of our own ideas that might help Sony's mega machine fly off store shelves. And you can participate, too: Simply visit opm.1UP.com after you read this article to vote for your favorite PlayStation 3 packaging. The winner will be revealed in the next issue—and, who knows, Sony may see who wins the vote and decide to pattern their packaging after it...or not!



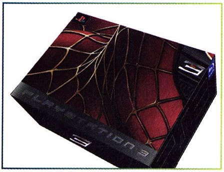
BOX A

Reminiscent of the original PlayStation 2 packaging, this PlayStation 3 box is meant to be simple, yet elegant. Sure, some consumers may be confused by the symbols on the box, but we think that the logo in the upper right corner should help.



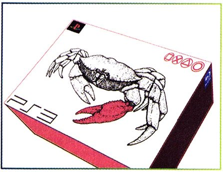
BOX B

This package is designed after the PSP packaging and is meant to show off the sleek lines of the system as well as send a clear message that you are indeed buying a PS3 and not a toaster—or some kind of George Foreman grill.



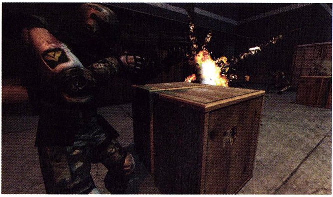
BOX C

It's Spider-Man! Whoa! No seriously, Sony seems so intent on using the Spider-Man font for the PlayStation 3 logo that it might as well go whole hog and just use the web slinger as a company spokesman. After all, Sony already enclosed a UMD of the first *Spider-Man* film with the first 1 million units of the PSP. Funny thing is, it almost works.



BOX D

What would any PlayStation 3 story be without a reference to historically accurate crabs with weak points? I mean, come on! And then they could even sell these things in the Discovery Channel store next to the DVD stack of *Dirty Jobs*!



PLAYSTATION BITS

BYTE-SIZED NEWS

***F.E.A.R.* your PS3.** Vivendi plans to release the popular PC first-person shooter *F.E.A.R.*, on the PlayStation 3 sometime in 2007. The game is highly regarded for its AI and visceral gunplay. Now with *Resistance, Half-Life 2, Turok, The Darkness, Unreal Tournament,* and eventually *Killzone*, it seems like the PS3 will have no shortage of shooters.... In other PS3 news, **From Software** has announced the cancellation of two RPGs for Sony's next-generation console and, while no specific reason was given, don't be surprised to see more companies streamline their production schedules given the cost of development.... And what would any kind of videogame news be without something about politics? **Cliff Stearns**, a Republican congressman from Florida, is proposing a bill that basically charges the ESRB with making sure that the in-game content matches the ratings on the box. Wow! What a novel concept.

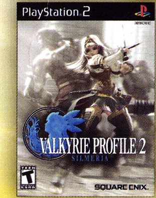
OVERHEARD

"There's no doubt that EA has historically bet more on [the] PSP. I think we were excited by the technology, but the consumers have proven that actually what they want is fun."—David Gardner, executive vice president and COO of Electronic Arts' Worldwide Studios tells U.K. publication *MCV* about EA's recent decision to focus on DS development over that for the PSP. Because apparently, the DS makes games fun by default.

DEFY THE GODS

ODIN THE ALL-FATHER HAS IMPRISIONED YOUR SOUL ~ THE SOUL OF A REBELLIOUS VALKYRIE ~ IN A HUMAN BODY. AWAKENED, IT IS TIME TO SEEK DIVINE VENGEANCE FOR TWO LIVES TAKEN AWAY.

VALKYRIE PROFILE® 2
SILMERIA


PlayStation 2
VALKYRIE PROFILE 2
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10 Hits
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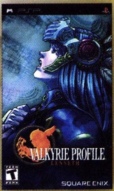
PSP
VALKYRIE PROFILE
LENNETH
SQUARE ENIX

SQUARE ENIX.
www.square-enix.com
Published by Square Enix, Inc.

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

- Alcohol Reference
- Fantasy Violence
- Mild Language
- Suggestive Themes

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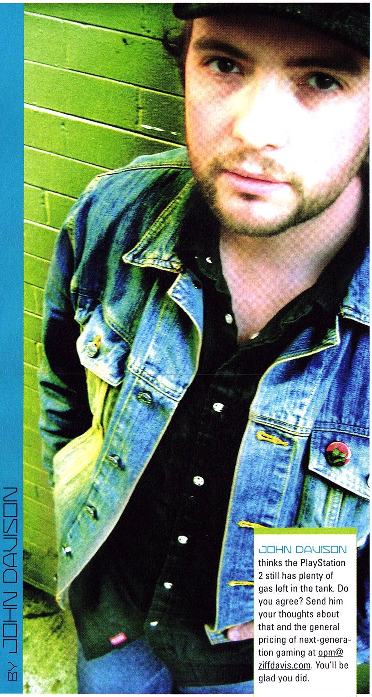
THE BIG PICTURE

BY JOHN DAVISON



JOHN DAVISON thinks the PlayStation 2 still has plenty of gas left in the tank. Do you agree? Send him your thoughts about that and the general pricing of next-generation gaming at opm@ziffdavis.com. You'll be glad you did.

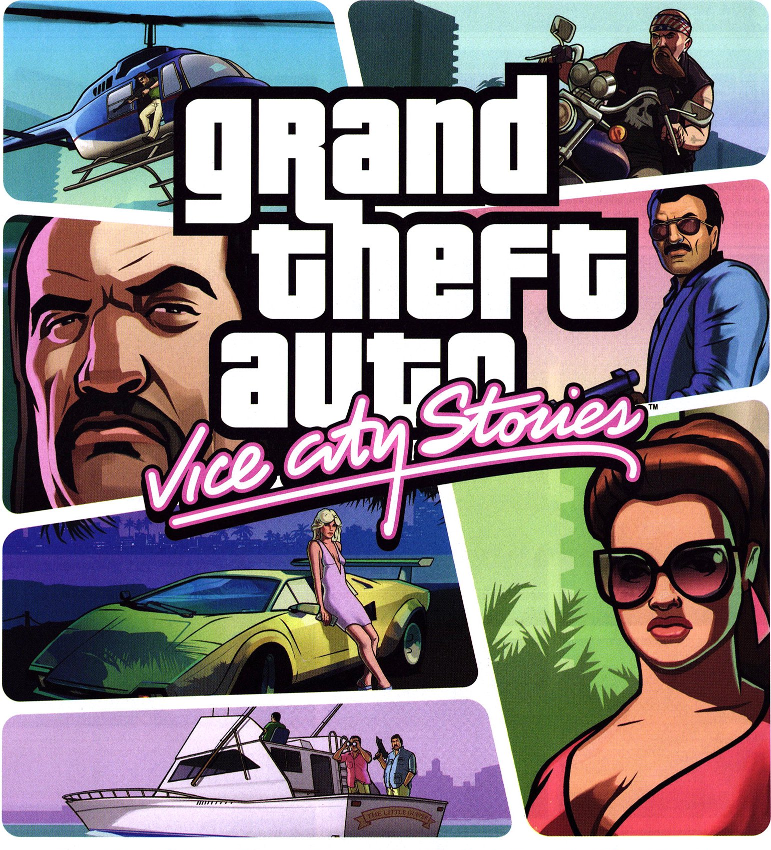
WHY THE PS2 IS STILL THE MOST IMPORTANT PLAYSTATION

Last time you endured my ramblings on these pages, I took a crack at exploring the benefits of episodic-gaming content on the PS3. After all, Sony's global-development übermensch Phil Harrison has been an outspoken proponent of the idea since the early PS2 days, so I thought I was onto something big. Since then, though, I've had the chance to speak to a number of big-time decision makers in the gaming industry and, for the most part, they have told me that the idea is essentially *nonsense*. As long as gaming publishers primarily sell boxes in stores, I'm told, we're unlikely to see much in the way of truly episodic content from the majors. Why? Because games cost *so damn much* to make. Yes, we'll see games with extra stuff to download, and I think we'll be spending the next couple of years arguing about the whole microtransaction thing (how much is *too much* for a new gun in *Warhawk*? Personally, I think they have some nerve even *thinking* of charging for things at that level, but that's something for a postlaunch editorial), but it's starting to look highly unlikely that the next *Resident Evil* or *Syphon Filter* will be released in chapters. The preproduction phase on games like these is such a big part of the development process—and such a humongous slice of the budget—that a publisher can't run the risk of your only wanting a $10 or $20 slice of it. What if you don't come back for more because you don't like it? They'd be screwed.

> WE MAY SEE SOME OF THE MORE DARING NEW IDEAS ON THE PS2, RATHER THAN ON THE PS3.

Xbox 360 owners have been up in arms (and rightly so) lately about the decision to charge $59.99 for the platform's big holiday hope, *Gears of War*. Prior to the announcement, Microsoft's Peter Moore had spoken at length about the importance of "lowering the cost of ownership" in order to make gaming more mainstream. Games can be prohibitively expensive, he argued—and that was hindering growth. Microsoft even bought a company called Massive, which places advertisements into games, under the premise that savings would be passed along to the consumer. It was a sound argument in principle, but as development costs increase on games designed for systems with smaller audiences (there aren't that many 360s in the world, and there will be fewer PS3s for the first few months) the difference has to be made up from somewhere. Guess what? Mountain Dew ads on billboards in racing games only go so far, so the rest of the bill has to be picked up by *you*. We need to get used to the idea of games costing $60 or $70, and then being charged more if we want cool extra stuff.

Well, that's all quite grim, isn't it? How can we possibly think about videogames as being a "mainstream" activity when all this is going on? The answer, conveniently, is in something you already own: the PS2. There are 38 million of them in the United States alone right now, and whereas Microsoft pretty much turned its back on the Xbox when the 360 launched, the situation we face in the PlayStation world is quite different. Development for the PS2 is cheaper, and the potential audience is bigger, so it's looking like we're going to see new PS2 games for many years to come. If this magazine's gigantic fall-preview feature last month is anything to go by, things aren't slowing down anytime soon and it seems safe to say that we may see some of the more daring new ideas on the PS2 rather than on the PS3.



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PSP™
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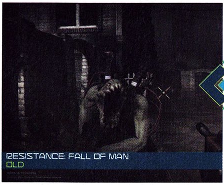
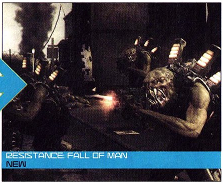
TRENDSPOTTER

LOOKIN' GOOD!

There's always one main problem with new console launches—when games are first shown, it's really difficult to get a good idea as to what the system can truly do. Part of that is because developers are just getting to know the system and what it can do, and, as time goes on, they discover new effects and features. In some cases, the entire project just gets totally revamped and ends up looking either completely different from or simply much better than what was previously shown. Below are a few examples of PS3 games that have progressed very nicely since their initial unveiling.



RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
OLD



RESISTANCE: FALL OF MAN
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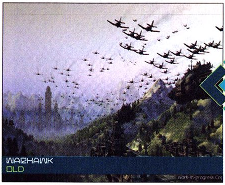
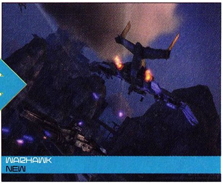
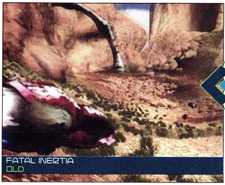


WARHAWK
OLD



WARHAWK
NEW



FATAL INERTIA
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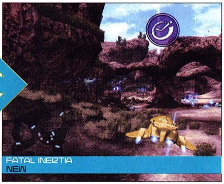

FATAL INERTIA
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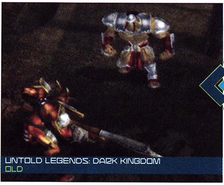
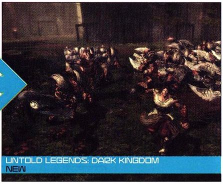


UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM
OLD



UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM
NEW

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WHAT'S IN YOUR PSP?

IT DOES MORE THAN PLAY GAMES

RICHARD LEMARCHAND
Game director at Naughty Dog

GAMES
LocoRoco
This game is sheer genius! It's an incredible piece of design, and has everything I love in a videogame: simplicity, depth, innovation, and charm.

MOVIES
Ghostbusters
I love the way that *Ghostbusters* combines fantasy, science fiction, and horror with comedy—so original, and still incredibly fresh after all these years!

MUSIC
M.I.A. (*Arular*)
It's more than a year old now, but M.I.A.'s punky electro-hip-hop insta-classic is still kickin' it large in my PSP.

WEB
boingboing.net
Boing Boing is THE blog if you're interested in how wonderfully weird the modern world is.

GAME ENVY

DEAD RISING (XBOX 360)

Do you love zombies? Of course you do. We all love the walking undead and their antics. Fortunately, Capcom's *Dead Rising* for the Xbox 360 does such an excellent job of portraying these scamps in their element—a shopping mall out in the middle of nowhere. You see, you're a photojournalist going on a trip Willamette, Colorado, because of some rumored goings-on in the area. When you get there, you discover that the Army has already arrived and has roped off the area to ground traffic, but from your helicopter you clearly see that something is amiss. Eventually, you make it to the mall and essentially have to survive for 72 hours, during which you help those who have yet to join the zombie horde, interact with psychos that have apparently converged on the mall, and use every possible weapon you can think off to mash in zombie skulls. And just about everything can be used as weapon, ranging jewelry from one of the stores in the mall to the lawnmower in the outdoor plaza. Awesome!

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EVERYONE 10+ E 10+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Language
Mild Violence

XBOX 360. XBOX LIVE.

EDITORS' CHOICE FINALIST

BEST OF E3

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

PlayStation 2

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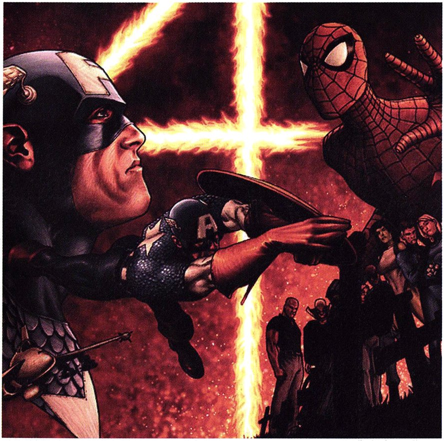
PAUSE WHEN YOU'RE NOT PLAYING GAMES

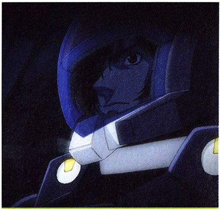


SEE

CIVIL WAR

Marvel Comics

This seven-issue series (which has crossovers into almost all the other Marvel books) centers around Congress passing an act requiring all superpowered beings to register their identities with the federal government. This act divides the heroes, with Iron Man and his buddies being pro-registration and Captain America (!) heading up the antiregistration group. On top of the solid art and writing are crazy plot twists, like proregistration Spider-Man unmasking himself on national television! Do yourself a favor and check out this innovative series.

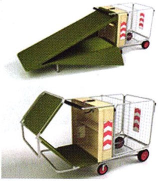


ROBOTECH: THE SHADOW CHRONICLES

Harmony Gold

Even though the recently released *Robotech* games didn't turn out to be all that great, that hasn't lessened our love for one of the best, if not the best, Japanese animated series. *Robotech* has some of the coolest mech designs that have yet to be topped by any other sort of giant robot. You'll get to see them again in this upcoming movie, which features the voice talents of Mark Hamill, among others. Woo, go giant robots!

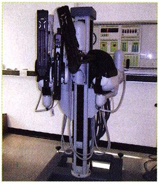
FEEL



MOBILE SHELTER

Panos Dramitinos & Alkis Karaolis

Since the $600 PlayStation 3 is probably going to either bankrupt or make people homeless, we figured that this little contraption would come in handy. Either that or it'd make for an excellent new Transformer in the upcoming movie. Anyway, the Mobile Shelter provides all the necessities that a hobo could ask for, including a cart to haul a payload. Yes, we're bad people.

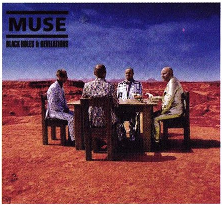


DA VINCI'S SURGICAL SYSTEM

RSID Studio

Dear god, this machine looks like some sort of horrible octopus that could torture people—the "torctopus," if you will. Actually, it's a surgical robot something or other that's supposed to perform all the simple surgeries that human doctors are supposed to perform, such as quadruple bypasses, brain transplants, and fingernail clipping. Technology is great!

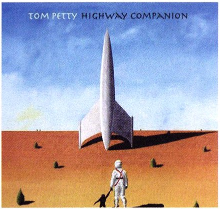
LISTEN



BLACK HOLES & REVELATIONS

Muse

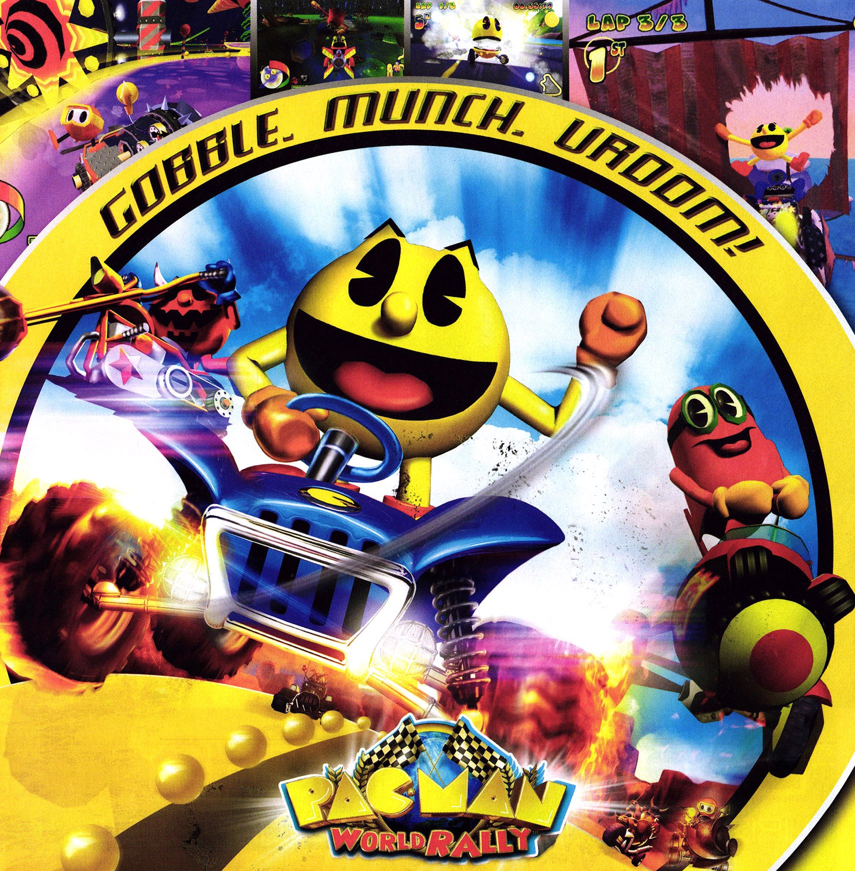
OPM's John Scalzi says, "These guys give The Darkness a run for the crown of Most Histrionic Band Since Queen." Dana disagrees and thinks they sound kind of like Radiohead. And if you listen to the second track on their new album, *Black Holes & Revelations*, then you may think they sound like The Killers. With such a kaleidoscope of sounds, how could you resist? Anyway, give it a listen or Mr. Scalzi will kick a puppy.



HIGHWAY COMPANION

Tom Petty

Who doesn't love Tom Petty? I mean, come on! His folk-rock music is so soothing that it would calm a pack of rabid hyenas. And not just normal rabid hyenas. We're talking a pack of rabid hyenas with machine guns and acidic saliva like the aliens from those movies. His latest album will do the exact same thing. Plus, it has a monkey and a rocket ship on the cover—two great tastes that go together. Mmmmmmm…monkey rocket ships.



PAC-MAN AND AN AMAZING CAST OF NAMCO CHARACTERS ARE BACK IN THE FASTEST, MOST EXCITING KART RACING GAME EVER! RACE ON WILD TRACKS OR FIGHT IT OUT IN BATTLE MODE WITH CRAZY PAC-POWERS AND EXCITING NEW WEAPONS.

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Mild Cartoon Violence

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

SMART BOMB INTERACTIVE

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

BANDAI NAMCO Games

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JADE RAYMOND

UBISOFT'S CREED KEEPER, GAME GEEK

If you don't know who Jade Raymond is yet, you will soon. Working away in the early days of her career as a programmer at both Sony and Electronic Arts, Jade's now a producer on one of Ubisoft's most high-profile games, *Assassin's Creed*, for the PlayStation 3—one of several games that really seem to be pushing the next-generation hardware. Not only that, but she also gets to work with one of the most talented development teams in the entire industry—not bad for someone who started with back-end server code.

photos by DARREN CURTIS

OPM **Is making games something you always wanted to do, or did you just stumble into it?**

JADE RAYMOND Actually, I had a pretty planned career the whole time. Basically, I've been making games for eight years now. I started out as a programmer and always knew that I wanted to get into the game industry. I thought I was going to be a programmer for a lot longer than I was—I was one for about three years—but I wanted to have more of an impact on the creative side. When I moved from Sony over to Electronic Arts, I originally had a technical role, but then they moved me into the producer position.

I guess I always wanted to get into the game industry—but being a producer, I don't think I had that as a goal. I thought I would stay on the programming side of it.

OPM **What attracted you to programming?**

JR Well, it's kind of the same thing that attracted me to the game industry. I played with computers and robots a lot when I was growing up; I used to play with the Lego Mindstorms stuff and write programs for them in Logo. My favorite subjects were math and art, so I was always into the creative side and technology in general—videogames are [the perfect venue] for that [combination]. They combine the most cutting-edge technology, and most of the interesting advances in computer graphics are being reinvented in games. Also, as an entertainment medium or even just as an art form, it's evolved the most. If you look at more traditional [media] like oil painting, animation, or movies—a lot of the standards are in place. Whereas with videogames, every time we get a next generation of consoles, we're able to push the boundaries of what a game is and redefine them.

OPM **What's preventing games from getting that same recognition from the general population?**

JR Games require a huge time investment. I think, as gamemakers, we—and the industry in general—are starting to make games that are sophisticated and targeted toward adults. They take less time. An example is Nintendo's *Brain Age* for the Nintendo DS, which is hugely popular in Japan right now. But there aren't a lot of those kinds of rich, deep entertainment experiences that can also be experienced in short sequences. Not many adults or people who aren't super game fans are going to dedicate 20 hours to learning a game and finishing it.

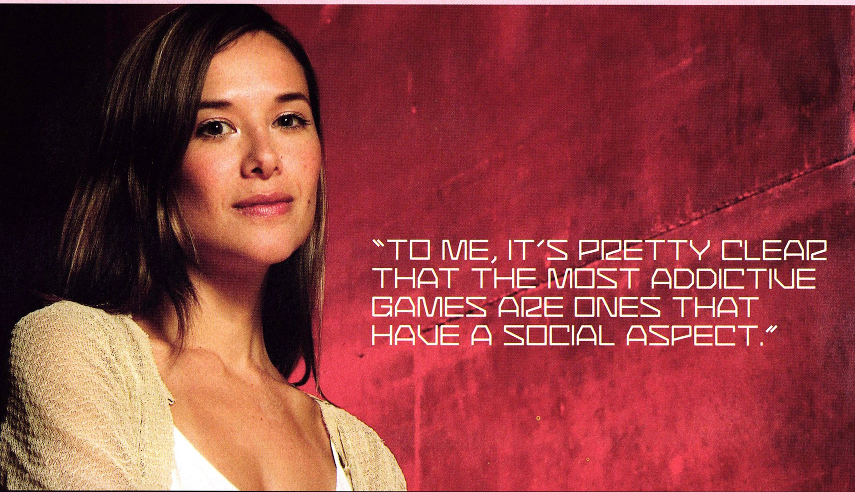
> "I USED TO PLAY WITH LEGO MINDSTORMS STUFF..."

OPM **You also had a stint in TV with *The Electric Playground*. How was that experience?**

JR That's something that I never thought I'd do. I was asked to give out awards at a Game Developers Conference awards ceremony a few years ago. The executive producer of the show saw me giving out the awards and set up an interview with me to talk about the game I was producing at the time. At the end of E3, he asked me if I wanted a job—and for a long time, I said no, because I'm a programmer, not an actor. I didn't feel like getting in front of the camera; I thought I was going to be crap. I said no for many months—then I realized the reason I was saying no was because I didn't want to look like an idiot in front of the camera. And then, finally, I thought that wasn't a good reason to not do something—to be scared that you're going to look like an idiot. I gave it a shot and probably looked like an idiot in my first few interviews, but it was a lot of fun, and it was really cool to push myself to do something outside my comfort zone and outside of what I ever thought I would be doing. It's a nice change outside game development—to see the other side of it and to interview other people making games.

OPM **It seems like you have a broader perspective than most game developers with that résumé. Does it help you in the game-development process?**

JR I'd like to think so. That's what's really important in a producer role, where you have people from all of these different



"TO ME, IT'S PRETTY CLEAR THAT THE MOST ADDICTIVE GAMES ARE ONES THAT HAVE A SOCIAL ASPECT."

backgrounds reporting to you, and you have all of these games that require so many different skill sets—people who are specialized in different areas. Even if I don't understand them all—and I couldn't possibly pretend to understand them as deeply as the experts on my team—I still have a great appreciation for what everyone does.

| OPM **Do you find that there are decisions made based on your own personal experience as a programmer if, say, you have a huge task for the programming part of the team?**
| JR I try and leave those decisions to the lead programmer or the people with more expertise or those with a better understanding. Where it comes in handy is that all of my leads and all of the people on the team don't have to spend as much time explaining stuff to me, which is good. They can say they decided to do something for whatever reason, and it makes sense to me, and I can say something intelligent instead of having no clue what they're talking about. It helps me make better calls and saves time.

| OPM **Is there anything you imagined would be very different about the industry?**
| JR Well, as for my experience being a programmer, I had a lot of fun at first, but what I found was that I ended up getting specialized in back-end server code for multiplayer games. At the time, multiplayer games were just starting, so there weren't a lot of people doing that kind of stuff. So I got stuck doing it. And when you're doing this stuff, one game ends up looking like a lot of other games—like you're solving the same low-end problems. I got bored. The reality with game development is that you don't have a lot of time to develop a game, so if you have someone who's good at something, you're not going to take the risk of shifting them to something they're not good at.

Being a producer is different from company to company. My job at Ubisoft, being a producer here, is superfun. I think it's more fun than I would've imagined. It's a lot of long hours and stuff like that, but it's really, really rewarding. You get to work with all kinds of passionate people and think of new problems every day. You're making a game, and the goal is to make it fun—and it's fun to make things fun! [*Laughs*]

| OPM **Is there a dream game you've always wanted to create?**
| JR Yeah, I think—like everyone in the game industry or even anyone who likes games—I have probably 100 ideas of various game designs. I have a whole bunch of games I'd like to make. I guess one I'd be interested in making next returns to your first question of why games haven't gained necessarily the same status as an entertainment medium like movies. I'd like to figure out how to make a game that can be digested in smaller chunks but can also be edgy and culturally relevant. Games have done that really well for kids with stuff like *Pokémon* that's superaddictive and superfun, but we haven't found a way to translate that experience into an [adult game].

| OPM **Do you mean episodic content, or something more self-contained than that?**
| JR Not necessarily episodic content, because that has its own kind of issues if you miss an episode or other people get ahead of you. There are definitely going to be some interesting things going on with [episodic content] in the future. I know a lot of people are thinking about it, and that there are also a lot of people that have tried it in the past and not really succeeded—that wouldn't necessarily be the approach I would take.

| OPM **What trends are most exciting to you?**
| JR To me, it's pretty clear that the most addictive games are ones that have a social aspect. Online is already huge, and we've seen with games like *World of WarCraft* how many people can be obsessively playing a game that would normally be classified as "hardcore." I think that's pretty cool, and I think there's still a lot of room to evolve in that area. The biggest area where we're going to see differences in games coming up is in controls, and I think the approach Nintendo took is just the beginning. If you look what's been happening with us, we've been focusing on better graphics and AI—very technical stuff, but there hasn't been a lot of focus of what we can do with controllers. That's what we're seeing with *Guitar Hero* and *Dance Dance Revolution*, so we're getting there, but I think that's going to be the key when we take the next step. |

THE CREED

Jade's current project, *Assassin's Creed*, isn't just a great game to look at—it also features some of the most advanced crowd AI for a game of its type. Just looking at the way different people respond to the assassin Altair and how he interacts with the crowd is pretty impressive.

X kevin robinson
WOODWARD
WOODWARD
get Xtreme x get RIGHT GUARD
POWER STRIPE
Stronger Fragrance!
RIGHT GUARD
XTREME
FRESH BLAST
INVISIBLE SOLID
ANTI-PERSPIRANT DEODORANT
NET WT 2.6 OZ (73g)

OCTOBER 06

THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION

SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY

01

Roger Maris sets his 1961 record of **61 home runs** in a season. As far as we're concerned, it still stands.

08

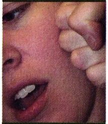
Believe it or not, our **favorite alien ass-kicker** (sorry, Ratchet) turns 57 today.

29

Today is **Internet Day**, which totally reminds us that in 19 days we'll be able to connect to online networks in a whole new way—from our PS3!

09

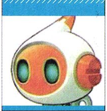
Leif Erikson lands in Newfoundland in 1000; 1,006 years down the road, we're stuck with Celine Dion. Oh, Canada....



16

It's **Freedom from Bullies at Work Week.** We say whoever came up with that holiday should get a punch in the face.

NEW GAMES



03

Enjoy the adorableness of puppies and Tokobots as you play ***The Sims 2 Pets*** and ***Tokobot Plus.***

10

If you like punching gorillas in Mexican wrestling masks and getting turned into a chihuahua by spandex-clad she-devils, then ***God Hand*** is for you!

17

We'd ***Destroy All Humans! 2*** get our hands on some ***Lumines Plus.***

24

RPG fans get a huge helping of goodness from new releases ***.hack//G.U.*** and ***Phantasy Star Universe***, on store shelves today.

NEW GAMES

04

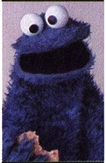
The first **Hooters** opens in 1983. We're betting that today those breasts inspire hoots of a different kind.

11

It might be **Bring Your Teddy Bear to Work Day,** but if you do, people will probably decide to celebrate **National Kick Butt Day** two days late.

18

Go to the bar and take your best game—today is the **NES**'s 21st American birthday!



12

C is for cookie, and O is for October, which happily happens to be National Cookie Month.

Trondheim
Sweden
Molde
Norway
Lillehammer
Mora

26

Norway becomes independent from **Sweden** in 1905; 101 years later, people still can't tell them apart.

NEW FLICKS

06

Today marks the debut of ***The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning.*** We say screw ***The Beginning***—we're waiting for ***The Ending.***

13

We think ***The Grudge 2*** will be awful, but maybe that's just because it's **International Skeptics Day.**

20

The movie version of ***Fast Food Nation*** comes out; pick up a bucket of KFC and a McDonald's value meal for the show!

NEW FLICKS

14

In 1982 Ronald Reagan declares the **War on Drugs,** starting the trend of wars that we can't seem to finish.

28

Sarcasm Awareness Month is almost over, which means in three days we won't even recognize that we're cynical bastards.

MIDGAR DIED...

八
08
壱
01
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07
5

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Mild Language
Use of Tobacco
Violence

PlayStation 2

SOMETHING SURVIVED...

THE WORLD OF FINAL FANTASY® VII IS ABOUT TO EXPLODE.

A mysterious organization has emerged from the wreckage of the Meteor disaster. The enigmatic Vincent Valentine may be the only one who can save this shattered world.

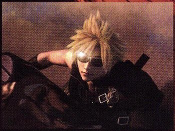
Set after the events in FINAL FANTASY VII and FINAL FANTASY VII ADVENT CHILDREN, this entirely new game features familiar characters, dazzling gunplay and shocking truths never before revealed!

DIRGE of CERBERUS™
FINAL FANTASY® VII

Take on new enemies and dangers in dazzling 3D environments

Vincent: This ends here.
Leave him to me.

Stunning graphics and CG cinemas continuing the epic storyline



Meet familiar faces and unique allies in an all-new action adventure

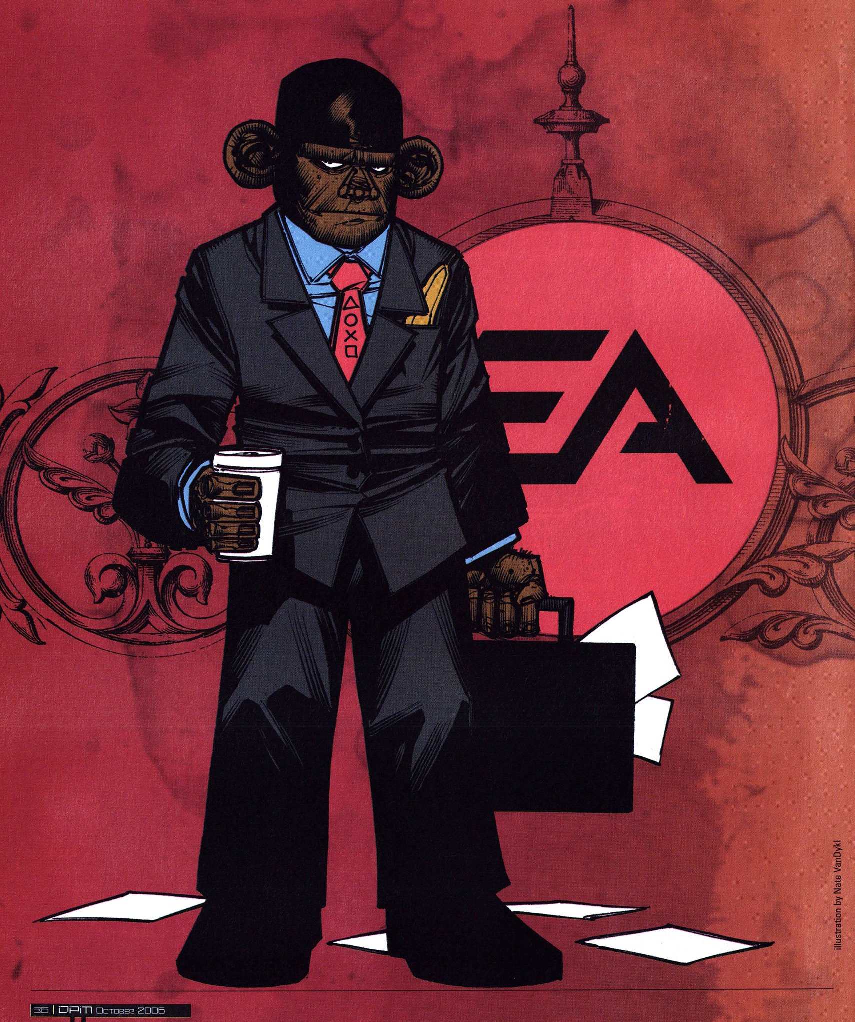


illustration by Nate VanDykl

INSIDE THE DEVELOPERS' STUDIO

WE GO BEHIND THE CURTAIN AND LET DEVELOPERS SPEAK

There are big game makers, such as EA Games. Then there are the teams who go it alone, forging a sometimes difficult path in an increasingly expensive world. We talked with corporate studios, like Criterion and EA Montreal, and independent teams, like Insomniac and Q Entertainment. So come along as we take a look at game making—and the titles that are the end products—from the developers' perspective.

THE PEOPLE VS. EA

MEDIOCRITY? LACK OF INNOVATION? ELECTRONIC ARTS FACES ITS HARSHEST CRITIC: YOU

With a yearly revenue of $3 billion, hundreds of games, more than 7,000 employees, and offices in 30 cities worldwide, EA can easily lay claim to being the largest third-party gamemaker in the universe. Who would fault you for thinking of the EA as a runaway success? After all, this is the house that built *Madden* football, the *Need for Speed* series, the *Medal of Honor* games, and a virtual mountain of gaming greats that go as far back as 1983's *M.U.L.E.* for the Atari 800.

EA's road to dominance hasn't been without its sinkholes. In recent years, EA bashing has become a sort of spectator sport on web forums, with accusations ranging from the company's fear of risk-taking and corporate arrogance to outright competition-crushing monopoly.

Recently we trolled the Internet to gather all the "claims" against EA and see what all the fuss was about—and then gave EA a chance to defend itself. Here are the top six charges (you can read the full version with all 10 on opm.1UP.com) and then see EA's defense.

THE PLAINTIFF

Readers who answered the question "Why do you hate EA?" on Editor-In-Chief Tom Byron's blog (OPMtomb.1UP.com) and the OPM message boards on 1UP.com.

THE DEFENDANT

Electronic Arts: Jeff Brown, vice president of corporate communications, and Nick Earl, vice president and general manager, EA Redwood Shores, representing.

CHARGE 1

EA IS AFRAID TO TAKE RISKS

***"There is one thing that I truly hate and that is their bitterly ironic slogan 'CHALLENGE EVERYTHING.' There is nothing they are challenging in the game industry...Do you think they would ever develop something rare and fun as* Ico, Psychonauts, *or* Katamari*?"* —blog response**

| **EARL** "We've taken a lot of chances in a lot of ways. *Majestic* was a real risk for us in terms of trying to create a new kind of game, a new genre. We fell on our face a little bit there, but it was an incredible learning experience for us. *Sims Online* was a big risk. At the time it seemed like a no-brainer, but honestly, the company was delving in and exploring areas we had no business and no experience in at that point. *Godfather* was a huge risk because we were venturing into the open world space, and other than Rockstar North, for whom we have tremendous respect, no one had really nailed the genre. That was a really tough and sometimes dark journey that I think has paid off for us now."

CHARGE 2

EA DOESN'T INNOVATE

***"My biggest beef with EA is that they are in the best position to promote creative, new products. Instead they just keep updating their tired old franchises and licensed crap." —OPM* message boards**

| **BROWN** "I think the people at the NFL would agree that *Madden* innovates more every year than the actual sport does. *Madden* is a top seller year after year because it's different."

| **EARL** "[We announced] *Spore*, a product by [*Sims* designer] Will Wright. The analog swing that we initially got in the PS2 controller for *Tiger Woods* helped propel that into a mainstream product. Along with that we made a feature called Game Face which allows you to create yourself in real time, and leveraged that into Mob Face in *Godfather*. Analog controls in *Fight Night*. [...] There's a level of innovation that sometimes gets forgotten.

CHARGE 3

EA OVERRELIES ON LICENSED PROPERTIES

***"How long has it been since you've seen an EA-developed [intellectual property]? All they do is buy studios and take their IPs and drive them into the ground. Also, they take licenses from let's say ESPN, CLC, NASCAR, and so on. Oh, and* Lord of the Rings *and* Harry Potter*. Can't forget the movie licenses, can we?"* —blog response**

| **BROWN** "Agreed. Everybody here agrees. About four or five months ago we locked down a policy that we need to change our portfolio to have less of a reliance on licensed properties and a greater percentage of our revenue on solely owned IPs. Last year about 30 percent of EA revenue came from wholly owned ideas, unlicensed. This year it's about 40 percent and the target is to get that over 50 percent within a year."

| **EARL** "We're shooting to get half our portfolio based on EA-owned IP. Products like *Spore, Sims, Medal of Honor, Army of Two* (that is a really fresh take on action), *Black, Burnout, Need for Speed*, and *Battlefield*. We have a product we're doing at EA Redwood Shores that is an original from scratch that the former *Bond* team is working on."

"THE GAMES GET BETTER EVERY YEAR, THAT'S WHY PEOPLE BUY THEM EVERY YEAR."

CHARGE 4

EA IS ARROGANT

***"EA...killed all my favorite franchises, only to replace them with their own.* Ultima*, dead.* Wing Commander*, dead.* Dungeon Keeper*, dead.* Populous*, dead.* System Shock*, dead.* Lands of Lore*, dead . . .* And Command & Conquer *only lives on as a shell of its former self." —*OPM message boards**

| EARL "I think there have been moments in our history where we came off as arrogant. But if you look at the company now, we have tremendous respect for our competition. We listen intently to our customers [and] retailers, we understand that while we have market leadership, we are nowhere near our growth potential and nowhere near our ability to consistently deliver the best games we can deliver.

"To answer the charge about not revitalizing certain franchises, that's actually not true. There are several unannounced franchises we are working on right now from that list that we are bringing back out. There are several that we are starting up again that we want to bring back to the fans. Sometimes it comes down to how loudly the market is screaming for something."

CHARGE 5

EA GAMES HAVE BECOME MEDIOCRE

***"Indeed, they continuously pump out mediocre games, and they are the market leader for third parties right now. They simply are 'riding the wave' because they don't have to work to make a hit."*—blog response**

| BROWN "The games get better every year. And that's why people keep buying them every year. That's why, whether it's *Madden* or *NBA Live* or *Need for Speed*, the reason why these are [yearly] franchises is because people want them. Some will say *Madden* doesn't innovate, but 5 to 8 million people lay out cash for the thing because they think it does. Obviously we're doing something right."

| EARL "One measure to look at is our Metacritic.com average...because we can get great data on how our audience looks at our games vis-a-vis other games. If we're not the best in the industry, we're certainly in the top three. My guess is that some of our key franchises that have had bad years or some of our licensed titles that have not done well stand out, but if you look out across the breadth of our products, you'll see we're very strong and consistent with quality."

CHARGE 6

EA RUSHES GAMES

"NCAA Football 07 *for PSP's touch-football glitch." —*OPM message boards

| EARL "For every rushed games I can give you two we didn't for reasons of quality. [*James Bond 007*]: *Everything or Nothing* was the best-rated *Bond* game we ever shipped and we delayed that to after the holidays—and took a huge hit financially. The shareholders didn't like that, but ultimately, they understood as we did that the most important thing here is the quality. *Godfather* was also a pre-Christmas schedule [title] that we ended up shipping in March. It was a very painful thing to have to move financially as a public company, but it was the right thing to do for the franchise. *Battlefield* we delayed almost a year. There are many examples."

| BROWN "Frequently software has bugs and some are worse than others. When you make sports games, your window is your sports season. You've got to be there at the start of the season. It makes no sense to ship *Madden* in January."

TAKE ME DOWN IN

BURNOUT 5 CRASHES INTO THE NEXT GENERATION by DANA JONGEWAARD

7901
7901
8166
7901

CRITERION'S RÉSUMÉ

Scorched Planet
(1996 - PC)

Sub Culture
(1997 - PC)

Redline Racer
(1998 - PC)

TrickStyle
(1999 - Dreamcast, PC)

Suzuki Alstare Extreme Racing
(1999 - Dreamcast; 2000 - PC)

Deep Fighter
(2000 - Dreamcast, PC)

Airblade
(2001 - PS2)

Burnout
(2001 - PS2; 2002 - XB, GC)

Burnout 2: Point of Impact
(2002 - PS2; 2003 - XB, GC)

Burnout 3: Takedown
(2004 - PS2, XB)

Burnout Revenge
(2005 - PS2, XB; 2006 - 360)

Burnout Legends
(2005 - PSP, DS)

Black
(2006 - PS2, XB)

Burnout 5
(2007 - PS3, 360)

PARADISE CITY

Criterion Games is aiming for the world with *Burnout 5*, starting with your PlayStation 3. The company is taking its love of speed, explosions, and fire to the next generation in order to create some of the craziest and most beautiful crashes in gaming. After all, as one of the team members put it: "A f***ed-up car is a beautiful thing."

INSPIRATION INFORMATION

One of the places the audio team is looking for inspiration is *C'était un rendez-vous*, a 1976 short film by French director Claude Lelouch. The eight-minute movie is a single cut of a person driving through the streets of Paris at speeds of up to 125 mph (according to Lelouch), running red lights and swerving around other traffic. While the car used to make the film was a 6.9L Mercedes-Benz, the audio is actually from a Ferrari 275GTB; the sound from an engine capable of higher revving actually increases the overall sense of speed in the film. Check it out for yourself at http://www.axe-net.be/rdv/.

FUTURE PERFECT

"If you couldn't make a great game on the PlayStation 2, you can't make a good game on the PlayStation 3," says Alex Ward, the director of game design for *Burnout 5.*

We're sitting in a conference room at Criterion's offices in Guildford, England, a suburb southwest of London. Criterion, which spun off from a research group at the European division of Canon (the Japanese electronics giant known mostly for its cameras) back in 1993, put out its first game back in 1996. It wasn't until 2001 that the company released a game on Sony hardware (the PS2 hoverboard title *Airblade*). And it wasn't until 2004 and the release of *Burnout 3* (which earned *OPM's* Game of the Year title) that people really sat up and took notice.

While the previous *Burnouts* have all built on the technology of their predecessors, *Burnout 5* is going back to page one. "For us, this is a total reset from one generation to the other," says Ward. "One of our goals is to be truly 'next generation,' and that means starting from the ground up."

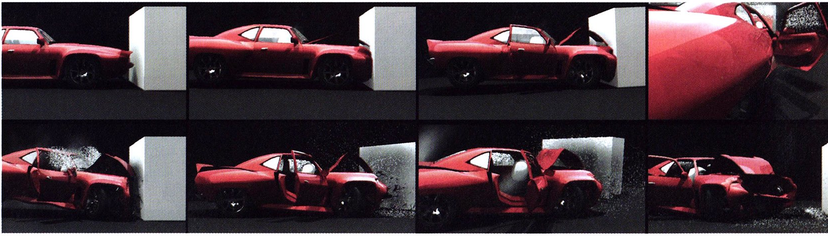
One reason for that mind-set: This is Criterion's first time around with the new system, and the team doesn't want to make incorrect assumptions about its capabilities. Alex Fry, the game's technical director, explains: "The first thing you have to do when you get new hardware is learn it. Beating it into submission doesn't make sense; you have to work with it." By the team's estimate, just one of the machine's seven synergistic processing elements (SPEs) has more power in it than the entire emotion engine of the PS2.

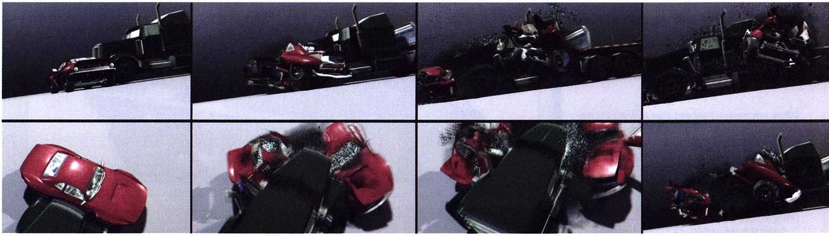
But learning the technology is only part of the reason. "We know the audience is expecting a leap, and we don't want to disappoint our audience," Ward says. "If, the first time you see the cars wreck [in *Burnout 5*], you don't think, 'That's why I bought the PlayStation 3; the next gen is here,'—if you think, 'Eh, it's a little better,' or 'It did that last time,'—then we haven't gotten there. So that's why the first thing we have to nail is the crashing."

CRASH INTO ME

Everyone marveled at the amazing results that Criterion's software got from the PS2, but it took some tough decisions to get there. If the team wanted to spend more of the computing power on graphics, they'd have to pull back in another area, such as audio. If they wanted to keep that sense of speed, the number of objects running physics might need to be dialed down. But not anymore. Thanks to the Cell processor, they're now able to truly get graphics, physics, and audio to work together as a team to create some of the most mind-blow-

> "BEATING THE HARDWARE INTO SUBMISSION DOESN'T MAKE SENSE."





CRASH TEAM

Several members of the development team, clad in their freshly delivered *Burnout 5* shirts. From left, Steve Uphill, art director; Paul Glancy, lead game designer; Nick Laviers, audio director; Alex Ward, director of game design; Yuta Nakamura, senior car modeler; Kiana Mohseni, online producer; Matt Webster, executive producer; Lewis James, sound designer; Hamish Young, producer; Gavin Rouse, programmer; John Twigg, lead audio engineer; and Emily Newton-Dunn, producer.

ing videogame effects ever seen. Executive producer Matt Webster explains: "Cell has lifted limitations, and those are the two areas that win—audio and physics. And, in particular, our own brand of how we use those."

Having physics in a game means that objects respond to contact with the environment as they would in the real world; doing that takes a lot of computing power. On the PS2, the car being driven might have been operating according to the laws of physics, but the other cars flying off to the side were simply running scripted responses, which meant that they were all behaving the same way. With the PS3, that's finally changed. "Now we don't ever have to walk the line on what's running physics and what's not," says producer Hamish Young. "It all is."

The physics will have a lot more parts to work with as well. Whereas cars in *Burnout Revenge* were composed of 12 different parts, cars in *Burnout 5* will now have 80 different pieces that can get blown off in a collision.

But merely copying reality isn't what Criterion wants to do. "We see a lot of teams trying for 'real physics'—which we translate into 'boring physics,'" Young continues. "But where we differ from them is that they try [to] get it accurate, whereas we're not trying to get it accurate—we're trying to get it believable and spectacular."

That's why now you'll see much more spectacular crashes. Roofs can be shorn off, and you'll be able to see cars get torn completely in half. Young beams, "A takedown's going to be so much more rewarding—if you take a guy down and he hits a cross-traffic truck and blows into pieces, it's such a bigger moment than when it hits a car and bounces off."

Ward adds: "Real physics don't make for great gameplay all the time. If we want to blow the car up, we'll blow the car up. Like when they blew up the Death Star—there's no fire in space."

Adding to the experience will be audio, which is taking a huge leap on the new hardware. Webster explains, "Audio was shortchanged on the last generation, but the PS3 has lifted the restrictions. They had 32 voices on the PS2; on the PS3, they're getting 1,000. On the PS2, they had a couple of megabytes of RAM; now, they're getting 10 times that much."

Nick Laviers, the game's audio director, explains the goal of his team. "When you make sound for a film, you're always looking for that special sound that describes that moment," he says. "It's not just going to tell you that a car smashed into a wall; it's also going to tell you, 'Bloody hell—no one could possibly ever have survived that!' You don't see human beings in *Burnout*—it's all about cars—so we're going to use the audio to give a human aspect to it."

They experimented with adding nontraditional sounds—such as a panther's scream—to crashes in *Burnout Revenge*; this time, *all* the crash audio is out of the ordinary. They play a sound sample of a collision—complete with spine-tingling shrieking and jaw-tightening crunches—and then tell us that no metal was used to create it. "Going back to the idea that absolutely real is a bit boring, there's a lot of

GET THE KEYS AND GO

The car selection in *Burnout 5* is getting away from the racer-heavy roster of *Burnout Revenge* and is adding some of the fun vehicles from *Burnout 3*. "It's a cross section of everything we've loved in all our games," says Ward. "In some cases, we couldn't work out why they *should* be in the new game, but we also couldn't work out why they *shouldn't* be in the new game."

RIDIN' IN MY CAR

While not having licensed cars is great for the *Burnout* team in some ways—for example, the way that lets you blow them up—it does present its own unique challenge. "If you show a fake car, it can be the most beautifully modeled thing in the world, but it's still a fake car," Ward explains. "We haven't been as smart as we could have been in how we present them."

Enter the real world: The team has been looking places such as car magazines and TV shows to see how they can help build an emotional attachment to a vehicle by means of presentation. One thing they're exploring is displaying new cars in the game like they might appear in advertisements, while another is giving each individual car its own iconic song.

audio in there that isn't traditional," Laviers says. Instead, the audio clip includes samples from trees, electricity, and apes in pain.

What's also amazing about next-gen sound is that, instead of being canned, it'll be customized for each collision. "For the first time ever, we'll really be able to tailor the audio," Laviers tells us. "What we're able to do is basically have crash AI, which will analyze what's happening and will decide which particular sounds to use for that moment." That means that the sounds you hear for every single crash will be different from the last.

He concludes, "We want to put the player into the crash—not just watching it vicariously, not just feel like you're watching it on TV—and actually [make the player] feel really involved."

WIDE OPEN SPACES

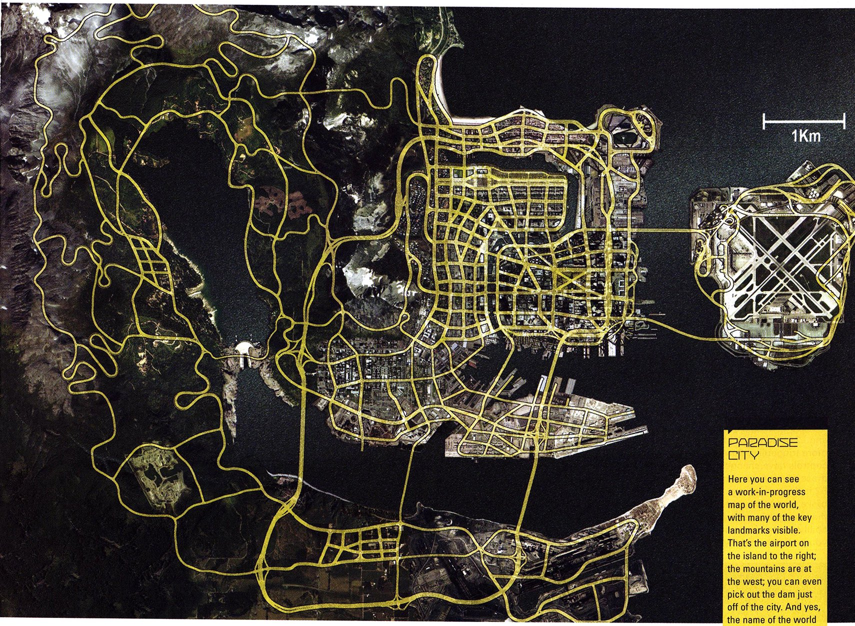
It's not just physics and audio that are getting more room to stretch out. In fact, the tracks are getting so much space that they're not "tracks" anymore—they're an entire seamless world. "We could have done the world four years ago," Ward says, "but we didn't, because we would've had to compromise on other things like the speed."

Right now, the world is still in the process of being constructed, and the team is currently working on the layout; once they've finalized where everything is going to go and included all the layers and shortcuts, they'll start adding the stuff that makes the *Burnout* games all look so amazing. Right now, none of that's there. But there's a car and a world, so the team hands us the controller and sets us loose to explore.

Richard Franke, the world designer, explains how they've gotten to this point: "We analyzed the layouts of some big American cities and cross-referenced those against the best tracks from previous *Burnouts*. We can't go actual size—we've had to be a little constrained—but we're definitely bigger than any other open world in any other racing game."

They estimate that it will take about five or six minutes driving uninterrupted at top speed to get from one side to the other. We're up in the mountains to the west of the city at present, but, looking down, we can see the smokestacks and skyscrapers in the distance. Adding iconic landmarks is extremely important to the team, as they want you to be able to navigate by looking around rather than by having to continuously examine the map. "That's something we hate from some of the other open-world games—it kind of looks generic; there's repetition of areas, and that's why you're always having to look to see where you are," says Ward. "It's 'How good of a cab driver are you?' It takes away the focus from the main experience."

> "IF NOT PLAYING THE GAME IS AS FUN AS THE GAME, THEN WE'RE IN."



PARADISE CITY

Here you can see a work-in-progress map of the world, with many of the key landmarks visible. That's the airport on the island to the right; the mountains are at the west; you can even pick out the dam just off of the city. And yes, the name of the world is indeed Paradise City. And yes, it is indeed named after the Guns N' Roses song. Some of the team members had been using the phrase "appetite for destruction" when talking about the game, and "Paradise City" naturally followed.

As in prior *Burnout*s, the city itself is made-up, but all of the sections are based on real-life places—for example, the mountains have been lifted straight out of Montana, the downtown area is based on New York City, the docks are from Shanghai, and that dam you get to zip across is modeled after the Hoover Dam. The team will be visiting all of these locations in person to capture video footage so they can replicate the flavor of each area as closely as possible.

As Ward watches us buzz around the world, he says, "That's another barrier to break in next generation—where not playing the game is the game. To me, two games really turned me onto how powerful the whole open world could be for *Burnout*—one was *Need for Speed Most Wanted*, and the other was *Mercenaries*. What we're also aware of this time is that if not playing the game is as fun as the game, then we're in."

WORLD IN MOTION

"How do we make this arcade experience more realistic?" asks lead game designer Paul Glancy. "Obviously, the open world is part of it—instead of bouncing around the world and going in and out of menus, now you're all in one big world."

In Criterion's offices, there's a board with fake driver's licenses for every team member, and the concept of a license is the mechanic that's going to drive *Burnout 5*. "Our progression is based on real-world driving offenses, and it's sort of real—but with a *Burnout* twist," explains Glancy. "An obvious one would be speeding, but in *Burnout*, you're speeding all the time, so that wouldn't be very difficult. So now it's about how long can you speed, how much over the speed limit you can go."

Ward pulls out a sheet from the Missouri Driver's License Bureau listing various offenses; the team looked to this sheet for inspiration when coming up with offenses. And then there are the violations that receive their own unique *Burnout* twists. For example, players will again be able to chain boost like back in *Burnout 2*, except now it's called "driving under the influence of boost." Oh, and although there are now traffic violations, there won't be cop cars running around enforcing the laws, à la *Need for Speed Most Wanted*.

One concern was that players not be forced into the situation of having to "find the fun"—in other words, having to drive around until they stumble upon an event. To that end, each car will have 10 different driving violations attached to it; one might be that you need to take a vehicle at top speed through opposing traffic for 20 miles. While this gives players goals that can be achieved anywhere, it also encourages them to make full use of every car that's available instead of sticking with one vehicle for most of the game. There'll also be location-specific events, too—in all, approximately 200 offenses will be attached to different locations throughout the world.

In addition to the violations, you'll also be competing against 34 different rivals—and having a persistent world means that your rivals are a constant presence, rather than starting fresh at the beginning of

FULL TILT

Two tidbits about the controller:

1. The *Burnout* team is planning to make full use of the PS3 controller's tilt functionality within the game. One place you'll see it is in Crash mode: Through controller manipulation, you'll be able to control your car's trajectory and flipping. And yes, the use of tilt will show up in other parts of the game—but for now, the team is remaining mum on specifics.

2. Because the controller shape has evolved slightly and the R2 and L2 buttons have become more triggerlike, *Burnout 5*'s controls have changed from those of previous games. Now R2 is the accelerator, L2 is the brake, and X is boost. However, the team plans to include the ability to remap the controls if you prefer the old layout.

each race. "We're trying to make the online and offline components as close as we can to one another," says Glancy.

To help with that, the rivals' AI will allow them to remember all of your interactions, and their behavior will follow accordingly. A few nasty encounters and they'll get more aggressive and start seeking you out. Beat them down a few more times, and they'll start to get scared of you. Eventually, when you've fully asserted your dominance, they'll start to flee when they see you. When they hit this point, you can chase them and catch them; this is how you add new cars to your stable.

The team wanted to do away with menus, so while the world itself will offer objectives—and there will definitely be events—you won't be selecting them from a list. One mode that's getting a huge overhaul is Crash mode, which has been blown wide open. You can now initiate a crash at any point and from any angle—with just the press of a button, the experience begins. Instead of a time limit, now the crash event will continue as long as traffic is piling up. Crash modifiers—such as the x2 and Heartbreaker from *Burnout 3*—are also being brought back into the mode. This time, instead of just sitting loose on the road, they'll be attached to certain vehicles, which will bear some sort of signifier indicating what they could do for your total. And while you can trigger a crash at any point—even in the middle of an event—there also are 50 different crash black spots that you'll need to find, which can all be played and replayed like the traditional crash junctions of prior *Burnouts*.

The specifics of how all the other events will trigger is still being worked out, but you'll have control over what you're playing. "If all you dig is road rage, you can drive around starting that up," Ward promises. "We're not going to say, 'Now you must do a traffic attack, then you must do a single race, then you must do this.' We want to say: 'Here are all the things you can do; how you get there is up to you.'"

Oh, and one other thing: Every area of the world will be accessible from the beginning. Accumulating violations will unlock more opportunities within the game, but no part of the city will ever be off-limits.

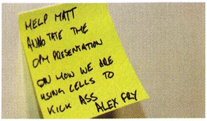
> "IF ALL YOU DIG IS ROAD RAGE, YOU CAN DRIVE AROUND STARTING THAT UP."

"We always think it's funny in some of the other open-world games where the world is locked off," says Ward. "Our world is open from the start. The number of rivals and events available will be gradually unlocked, but the whole bloody world is open."

COMMUNITY SERVICE

The team is making some big changes for *Burnout 5*, but one of the areas they feel most compelled to reinvent is online play. "We think

CHANGE IT.
SUPER CAR AUDIO NICK.
WORK WITH OLI ON HANDLING (DIFFICULT TO STAY IN DRIFT. M.W.) OLI
STABILISE THE PS3 HANDLING A.HUBBARD
PLAYER CAR N.M. Chee
PULLS OUT OF DRIFT DUE TO BUMPS/KERBS A.HUBBARD
ENGINE CONTENT IS IMPROVED. N.LAVIERS J.TWIGG
TAKE GEARS OFF SPEEDO. ROGER
GET CARS IN THE WORLD SO THEY NO LONGER SINK



OFFICE SPACE

The area where the *Burnout 5* development team works is filled with boards covered in Post-it Notes, which, in essence, serve as the template for the game structure. "We're not like other developers in the sense that on our server there's not one single design document sitting there that's going to tell you the whole game from start to finish," Ward says. "There are a great many cool games made that way, and I almost wish we could do that. But we don't do it because it would be boring to write, we'd have a big argument about it anyway, and in the time it'd take to write, we could have built stuff." Another advantage to such a public method of plotting the game design is that when changes get made everyone who needs to know can automatically see them.

it's our duty to expand online gaming beyond this PC paradigm of frags, deathmatches, and who's No. 1 in the world." Ward says. "We've played *Burnout Revenge* on Xbox Live, and we suck—I'm like 6,000th in the world. We get hosed at our own game."

Young chimes in. "We've seen a lot of online games based on who's the best in the world, and that's incredibly niche because you can only have, by definition, a few people who can be the best in the world. We want to appeal to the mass consumer, in that most people are more interested in playing their friends and people at their level and beating up people online. If you have a focus on who's the best in the world, it's not very personal. So the real focus for us has been on getting away from who's No. 1."

Kiana Mohseni, *Burnout 5*'s online producer, explains the underlying concept for the team's online plan. "*Revenge* 360 was the test bed for us; it was about tracking 1-on-1 relationships," she says. "And so our whole vision for *Burnout 5* online is based on tracking personal relationships."

With *Burnout Revenge* on the 360, the team started exploring some ways to make this happen. For example, they took information that the game naturally tracks and used it to make introductions between people. *Revenge* on Xbox Live also remembers whom gamers have played, reminds them of how many times they've already competed, and keeps track of the overall score between players. And the team's going to take this basic idea much further with *Burnout 5*.

"One feature we're building is called 'Marked Man,'" Mohseni says. "When you play online, you often hear people telling you, 'Oh, I'm going to come and get you this time.' So basically, we built that into the game, and people can 'mark' you." If you succeed, you get a snapshot of your opponent mid-takedown, which gets added to your trophy gallery.

However, the team wants everyone to have a fighting chance. As Ward says, "If you turn up and get your ass handed to you, you don't want to go back—it isn't fun. If there's somewhere you can go where you have a chance, then it's more interesting to me."

And that's why you'll have the opportunity to retaliate if you're marked, too. "That's what we call 'Dirty Tricks,'" Mohseni explains. "A Dirty Trick is where I can mess with your steering wheel or your brakes or lock your boost permanently on. And it's basically a weapon that will help level the playing field for people of different skill levels."

When asked about downloadable content, the team confirms that, yes, it will be available, but Ward would only hint at what it might be: "All I can say is that what we've seen so far [of downloadable content] tends to be fluffy, and we believe modes are where it's at."

There's a lot more in store, but we're not going to find out about it just yet. "We could tell you about five things that we're doing right now, but we *can't* tell you, because we might throw it away," Ward explains. "The greatest thing we've learned is that just because we've written it doesn't mean we can't delete it." We appreciate that kind of perfectionism—as long as it doesn't delay our chance to get our hands on the finished game. |

LOOK AT ME

Another component of the new world of PlayStation online that the team is excited about is the personal aspect that the camera is going to add. "Camera is the next thing—it's the biggest thing since voice," says Ward. "We love it."

DOUBLING

ARMY OF TWO BETS BIG ON THE CONCEPT OF TEAMWORK by JOE RYBICKI

DOWN

In 2005, KBR made an awful lot of money. According to the company's website, the group posted revenues of almost 11 billion dollars. KBR does two things, and it does them very well: Its Energy and Chemicals division offers support to the energy industry through "engineering, procurement, construction, technology and services," while its vastly more profitable Government and Infrastructure division offers support to the military through "logistics, construction and maintenance services for national governments as well as consulting and civil engineering services for local governments."

The 2005 year-end report of KBR's parent corporation is a bit more explicit, calling the Government and Infrastructure division "one of the world's leading defense-services providers," providing "'whenever and wherever' support across the full military mission cycle—from on-base services to the largest deployments." In other words, KBR draws most of its income from its function as a private military company, or PMC. In fact, KBR's G&I division is so successful that in 2005, it provided nearly 40 percent of the revenue of its parent corporation—nearly double the revenue of the next-biggest division. You may have heard of the parent corporation: It's called Halliburton.

MASKED MARAUDERS

Tyson and Elliot's ballistic masks represent real-world technology. "They're not something we just threw in there because we think they look cool," says senior producer Reid Schneider. In real life, the masks are rarely so colorful, but as with many other character elements, you can customize them like crazy.

CONTRACTOR'S SPECIAL

Private military companies are a growing force in the world. At their most innocuous, they provide civilian support for military action: building roads, stringing wires, or providing or servicing vehicles. They can take much of the logistical load off of the traditional military through their specialized services, allowing the military to focus on more immediate demands. But at the other end of the spectrum, many provide another military asset that's not often talked about: professional soldiers. This function is the basis for EA Montreal's ambitious co-op shooter, *Army of Two*.

There are a lot of benefits to augmenting a public military with a private corporation. Lacking the bureaucracy of, for example, the U.S. military, a PMC can respond more quickly to changing conditions, with more agility than its publicly funded counterpart. And private soldiers are often both better equipped and more experienced than the traditional military; the significantly higher pay—rumored to be more than $30,000 *a day* for particularly hairy assignments—tends to draw battle-hardened ex-military who may have gotten fed up with the mindless bureaucracy that permeates the life of a traditional soldier.

But there are less innocent reasons for a government to contract a PMC. "You can do things in a PMC that the military either can't or won't do," says Corey May, scriptwriter for *Army of Two*. "There are a lot of things that may be considered unethical or illegal, but they still need to get done. Assassinations are a big thing. You're not supposed to assassinate people; it's against the Geneva Conventions. For a PMC to go in there and do it, it's not going to dirty the government's hands."

SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

This is heavy, scary stuff. But the young team behind *Army of Two* isn't afraid of taking chances. "We're going one step beyond pure gaming, into the gray area," says Alain Tascan, vice president and general manager of EA Montreal. "Are these things possible? Do these things happen? You have things that happen today that, if a movie was made about them, you wouldn't believe it.

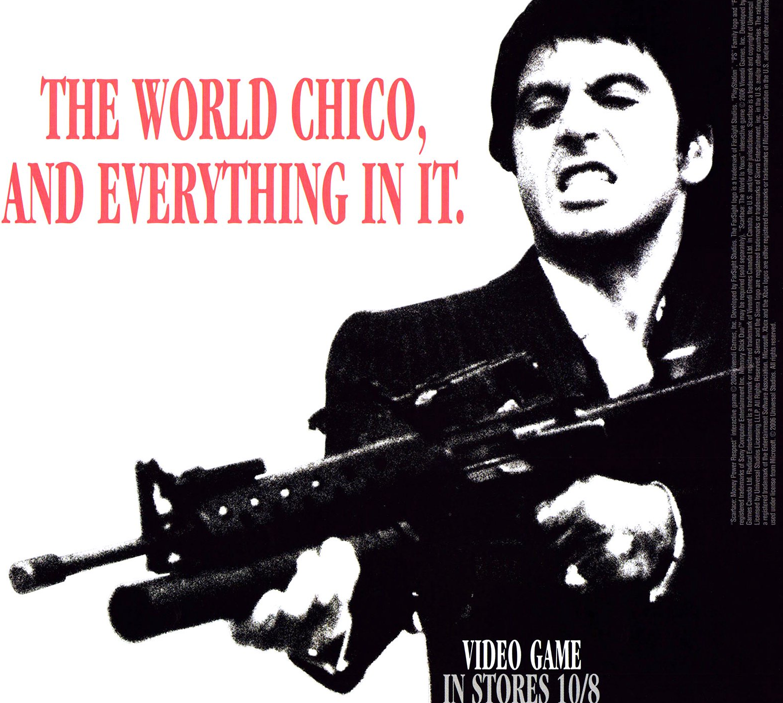
"Between one-fourth and one-third of the budget from the Pentagon is going into private corporations," Tascan continues. "This is the reality today. You're talking about 100 billion dollars. And think about a private company: What's your role? To make more money. And there is so much going on in the world right now—I would be an investor in Halliburton or the Carlyle Group right now, because between everything going on, it's happy times [for them]. It is not in the corporate interest to have less trouble in the world."

> "WE'RE GOING ONE STEP BEYOND PURE GAMING, INTO THE GRAY AREA."

This is the central conflict that underlies the story of *Army of Two*: the conflict between doing the right thing and doing the profitable thing. Here you have two private soldiers—the older, battle-scarred Tyson Rios and the young upstart Elliot Salem—who go beyond the restrictions of legitimate military for very lucrative sums of money. But

ME, I WANT WHAT'S COMING TO ME.

THE WORLD CHICO, AND EVERYTHING IN IT.



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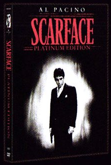

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Intense Violence
Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Use of Drugs

XBOX

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FARSIGHT
STUDIOS

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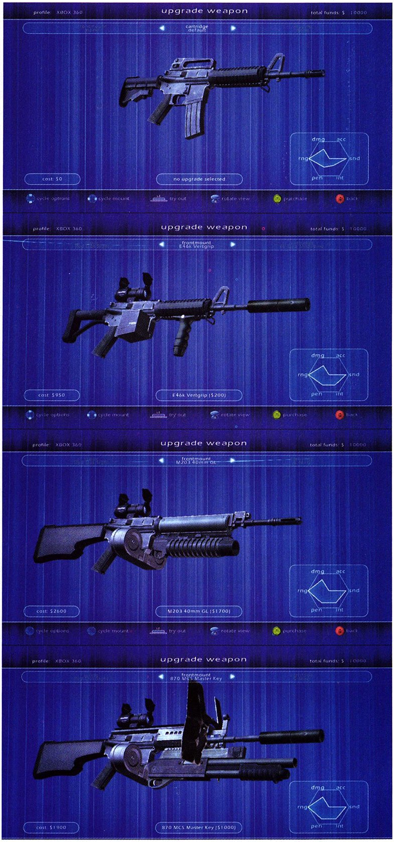
at some point, questions arise. "Later on in the game, they'll start facing these complicated situations," May says, "and they'll start asking themselves, 'Are we the good guys, or are we the bad guys?' They start to notice that there are certain things under the surface that may not sit well with them. So they're going to have to make some decisions: How much do you want a new car, or clothes for your kid, or a bigger house—and at what price?"

BUDDY SYSTEM

But this daringly topical story line isn't the biggest risk the *Army of Two* team is taking. That distinction belongs to the unorthodox gameplay mechanic that underlies the entire experience. *Army of Two* is a game based firmly in the idea of cooperation. You control one member of a two-man PMC team, and your partner is controlled either by a friend (in person or online) or by a very complex AI system the team is putting together. That may not sound terribly revolutionary, but that's probably because you're thinking of the type of AI-controlled, squad-based games that have plagued the industry in the past.

Make no mistake: This two-man idea is absolutely integral to *Army of Two. Every*thing in this game is done as a team, so much so that it's led to plenty of jokes about just how *close* these two characters are (jokes that now seem embarrassingly glib in light of the game's frighteningly plausible premise). This teamwork mechanic is the very reason for *Army of Two*'s existence, and it's what the team is fervently hoping will differentiate the game from other shooters.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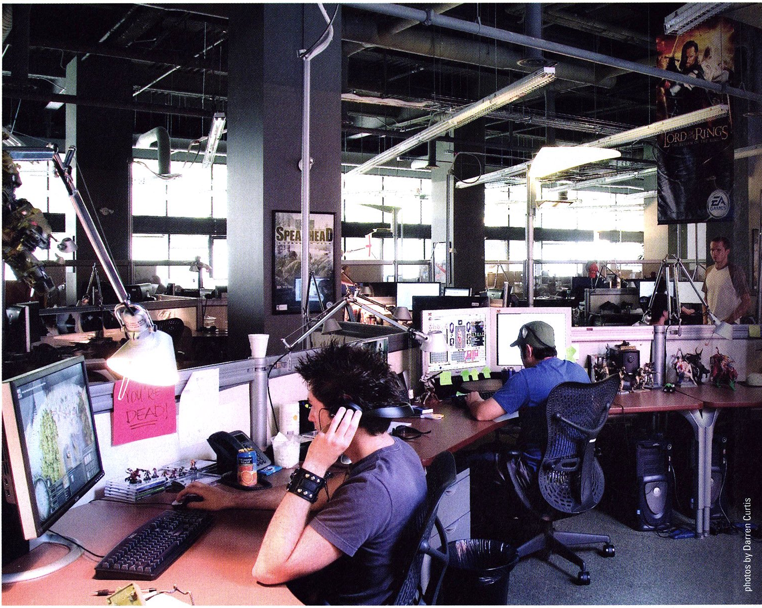
870 MCS Master Key ($1000)

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

One big feature of *Army of Two* will be the weapon-customization feature. By completing bonus objectives, you'll earn extra cash, which you can use to trick out your firearm. Among the many different features you can snap onto your piece: a shield, which deflects bullets but decreases accuracy; a pistol grip, which increases accuracy but decreases speed; a shotgun to clear out close quarters; and even a grenade launcher. You can even make changes to the gun's appearance, even going so far as to chrome-plate the entire thing.

STEERING THE JUGGERNAUT

EA MONTREAL IS AT THE VANGUARD OF "THE NEW EA"



photos by Darren Curtis

"It's not that we have this new laser gun, and big explosions, and stuff like that," says Tascan. "It's different on the design level. And it's not just like I push Button A and you push Button B—you can really interact together. It's a window you open for the designer, to the gamemaker, and to the storyteller: How is my partnership going to evolve as a result of what I'm doing? This new thing is going to open up tons of possibilities."

Lead designer Chris Ferriera elaborates: "In my opinion, every co-op game has been: 'OK, here's a single-player map—have someone else play with you.' And once in awhile, that second person becomes a key: You can use him to open this gate and get to this area. Our whole focus on the game design," he tells us, "is that the two characters are intertwined, and also interacting. These are two separate characters with different personalities who actually interact with the environment—and each other—in different ways. In terms of the gameplay, you're as responsible for my death as I am. Mission success—you are just as responsible as I am for getting that done. It's not like you just happened to be there. If we split off, we will never get through this area. We have to work together."

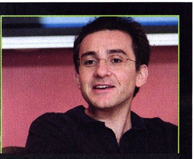
TWO'S COMPANY

Even at this early stage (the game is planned for release simply "sometime in 2007") *Army of Two* has plenty of interesting examples of teamwork-based segments. Consider this example: You start a level with a tandem parachute jump. You're controlling the speed and direction of your parachute, while your partner, armed with a high-powered sniper rifle, does his best to dispatch as many enemies as possible from your landing zone. By the time you land, he's taken out a good percentage of the waiting enemies, but quite a few still remain. In the middle of the landing area, you go back-to-back with your partner, giving you a full 360 degrees of view and protecting your less-armored backs.

"THESE ARE TWO SEPARATE CHARACTERS WITH DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES."

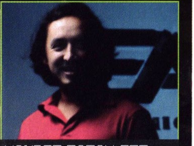
Having cleaned out your landing zone, you move on to the next area, a large canyon, liberally populated by baddies, with high ledges on the side. You wait by the entrance while your partner sneaks up to one of the ledges with his sniper rifle. He takes a few of the enemies before the rest of the group notices him. They dash toward his sniper spot...allowing you to storm in and spray the (now more tightly packed) group of bad guys with machine gun fire.

You finish off the enemy and move on to a warehouse sprinkled with crates, pallets, forklifts, and other equipment. You creep up behind a storage container with an enemy sentry posted on top. To get rid of



ALAN TASCAN

Vice President, General Manager



VANDER CABALLERO

Game Designer

THE TEAM

L to R: Marcus Fielding, development director; Francois Pelland, lead artist/level designer; Chris Ferriera, lead designer; Tascan; Caballero; Antoine Dodens, lead engineer, Steve Dupont, animation director; Reid Schneider, senior producer.

A game as unorthodox as *Army of Two* requires an unorthodox development team and an unorthodox development process. And EA Montreal provides exactly that.

Let that sink in a moment: an *Electronic Arts* studio as trendsetter? Iconoclasts within a company that built its house with nearly 17 years of *Madden*? Sequel-, franchise-, license-happy EA? Something has changed.

As the first of EA's internal "boutique" studios, EA Montreal has been able to write a lot of its own rules. Vice president and general manager Alain Tascan seems almost befuddled when he talks about the lack of invasive meddling from the higher-ups at EA's corporate center. "They know the company needs to go in a different direction. They know they have to innovate more than they have. So they have given us a lot of freedom," he says. "We are able to hire the people we want...and our people are able to get the gear they need."

Look around the office and you see top-of-the line...well, everything. Huge, dual-monitor setups; ergonomic chairs; a full-sized pool table; even a giant classroom for frequent training sessions to keep all the employees at the top of their fields.

Getting—and keeping—top-tier employees is clearly a priority for Tascan. "If you drew lines between all the major universities in Montreal," he says, "you would get something like a triangle. We're at the center of that triangle." The purpose: to recruit young, fresh artists and designers interested in creating something different, with the skills to do it and a minimum of cynicism about what is and is not possible in videogames.

The result is a shockingly different approach to design in which the entire studio not only contributes ideas to the game, but also has the tools to illustrate those ideas.

Game designer Vander Caballero explains: "The way we work is something that's quite new at EA," he says. "As a designer, it's hard to figure out everything that's going to happen and write it down: what's going to happen with the camera, what's going to happen with the physics, and so on. So we prototype our own design. Everyone goes off and figures out what works and what doesn't work."

"The idea behind it," Tascan says, "is that describing design with words is like describing music with words. You can describe some emotion, but if you want to say that to a musician, you need a score. It's the same thing with design. You can storyboard, but you have to *feel* it to know if it's fun."

THE DIVISION'S SOLE PURPOSE IS TO COME UP WITH AND PROTOTYPE OFF-THE-WALL IDEAS.

This unusual approach goes far beyond the tools, though: It's created a division within the *Army of Two* team, headed by Caballero, whose sole purpose is to come up with and prototype off-the-wall ideas, a team otherwise removed from the day-to-day schedule of game design. "Having Vander outside of the schedule and the milestone plan enables him to be more free about what he's doing," continues Tascan, "and to bring up crazy stuff. It's very liberating for his team. If everything were within one team, everyone would feel like they need to be efficient—so they would go with a sure bet. After one or two slaps in the face, they would be late on their schedule, and they would lower the risks they would take. By setting this up differently, we liberate them."

The result is plenty of ideas that proved too odd or unwieldy even for this genre-pushing game (see page 55 for examples of ideas that didn't make it), but with this open-minded team, more ideas have made it past the drawing board than anyone expected. "It turns out they have a 50 percent adoption rate," Tascan says.

It's clear, though, that this idea of empowerment is a philosophy that drives the whole studio. One indicator of this is Tascan's insistence on not requiring his employees to sign noncompete clauses. He wants them to *want* to work there, not feel like they *have* to. He even penned an open letter to the head of Ubisoft Montreal in 2003, decrying Ubisoft's tradition of noncompete clauses.

In the letter, which came in the wake of lawsuits alleging EA had poached some of Ubisoft's top employees, Tascan urged Ubisoft Montreal to "stop the illegitimate practice of forcing talented people to sign employment contracts that restrict their creative and economic freedom." This is indeed a new direction for EA. Let's hope it continues.

this guy, you boost your partner up to the top of the container, raising him only a little at a time with the analog stick to make sure the coast is clear before he climbs up. Turns out there's another guy up there you didn't see, so rather than climbing up, your partner rolls a grenade across the top of the container, and you hurriedly lower him back down.

The grenade goes off—sending the sentries flying—and all hell breaks loose. So you dash over to a forklift and use it to lift up a machine-gun turret that's conveniently located on a pallet. Your partner hops on and starts blasting away while you use the forklift to maneuver him into prime firing position. During this exercise, your partner takes some pretty heavy fire, and once you lower him back down, he's unable to walk on his own. So he throws his arm around your shoulder and you carry him along to a safer spot—yet all the while, you both are able to fire with your free hands. And so on....

FRIENDSHIP OF ONE

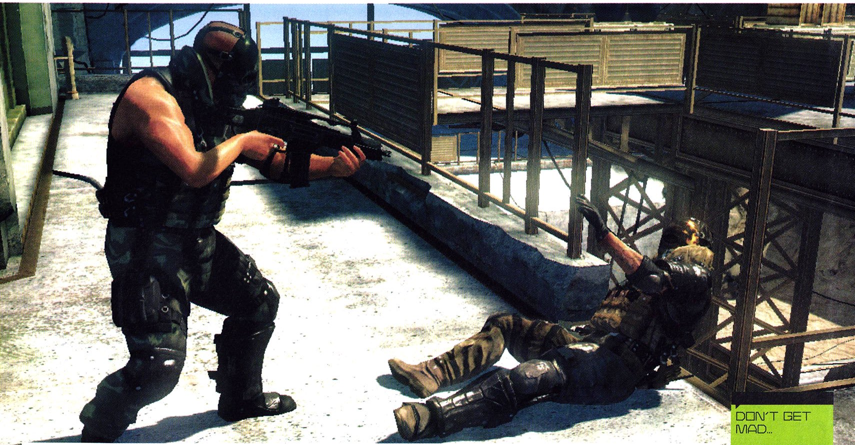
All of this may sound like a complete blast to play with a friend...but what happens if you're not online and you don't have a friend handy to accompany you in your adventure? Is it even *possible* to create a computer-controlled character that will behave realistically in these kinds of conditions? Not only is it possible, the team says—it's all but a given. "We won't release it if it's not working," says lead engineer Antoine Dodens. "It would be like releasing it if it had a bug. We would fix it."

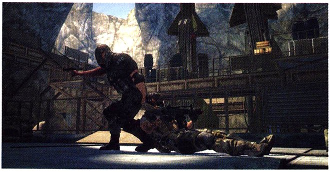
It's clear that the developers are not just interested in creating an interesting co-op game, but in creating an interesting co-op game *that can be played solo.* "We talk about 'next gen' in a lot of different aspects," Tascan says, "but one of the dreams we had was interacting with the machine—and having the machine respond to you. It's this concept of the 'friend in the box' that is close to our heart. When you're only doing things yourself, it limits the emotion you can feel: If you die, you start again. If you have a partner, you start establishing a relationship, and now you care about not only what you're doing, but [also] what the other guy is doing. And if something happens to him, you have a new kind of feeling. I think *Ico* started it with the princess, and that was a huge inspiration. Our aim is not only co-op in terms of gameplay, but in terms of feelings you can have throughout the game, because you care about somebody else."

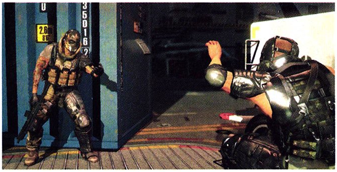
To this end, EA Montreal has an entire team devoted solely to making your AI partner behave in a lifelike fashion. Some of the ideas this team has come up with are revolutionary. "We need to give this partner AI a good memory," says Dodens. "So we're keeping track of everything that happens. If you're using the AK-47, and 20 percent of the time you miss, the partner AI is going to be aware of that. So the next time you go to use the AK-47 in a fighting situation, the partner's going to say, 'Oh, man—I don't agree with that. Change your weapon; you're no good with that one.' Imagine if you're playing and the guy says to you, 'I don't think this is the right way to do this.' He will

FAMILIAR FACES

EA Montreal may be relatively new, but the key talent behind *Army of Two* is well known: Most of them created the first *Splinter Cell*. Schneider, Dodens, Pelland, and Dupont all played key roles in launching that influential franchise.







DON'T GET MAD...

If you shoot, betray, offend, or otherwise piss off your computer-controlled partner, don't be surprised when he comes at you seeking retribution. He won't kill you, and he won't let you down in a firefight, but he will find interesting and creative ways to make you pay...dearly.

remember your failures, so the next time you replay the map he may say, 'Last time we did that, it didn't work.' That's really simple to put into place, but nobody's done that before."

MISTY, WATER-COLORED MEMORIES

And that memory will extend to more personal elements. Other games with teammate AI will let you wantonly spray bullets into your partners with no negative effects aside from maybe a "Hey, quit it!" Not so with *Army of Two*. "You always want to cooperate," says senior producer Reid Schneider, "but if you shoot your friend, he's going to come after you." He demonstrates by loading up a test level on the PS3 development kit, picking up a rifle, and shooting his partner in the leg. The partner immediately reacts, running up to Schneider's character and getting in his face.

"I will drop you right here!" the computer-controlled partner yells. Schneider shoots him again. Instantly, his partner unleashes a strong right hook to the face, and Schneider's character goes down.

"He's not happy," Schneider observes, "and he's going to knock me over. He may even head-butt me. And now he's going to be more angry with me; he'll still cooperate with me on moves, but he'll be really pissed."

Eventually, if you upset your partner enough, he will refuse certain opportunities for teamwork. "The idea here is that we can open up more or less co-op moves depending on what stage you're at in your cooperative mode," says Tascan. "He'll react to what I do; if I'm behaving like a jackass, he'll treat me like a jackass." And the actions that affect your relationship with your partner go beyond the physical; if you do something he doesn't approve of—gunning down a civilian, for example—he may nurse a grudge...at least until the next time you pull his ass out of the fire.

"But see, this stuff isn't going to happen in the middle of a gunfight," Ferriera says. "We don't want to interrupt the player. But at moments where there's not much going on, it gives life to the game."

> "IF I'M BEHAVING LIKE A JACKASS, HE'LL TREAT ME LIKE A JACKASS."

SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

And exploiting those generally empty moments is key to bringing life to an AI partner, the team says. "If you think about a shooter-type game," Schneider explains, "the moment-to-moment experience between gunfights is generally pretty boring. You're just waiting for the next encounter. But we thought we'd really make use of your partner, so now we think about how your partner will react to objects in the world. So imagine you're in someone's house, or whatever. Your partner may decide he wants to go in the fridge, and he passes you a beer.

It's an awareness of you and an awareness of the environment."

"It's an opportunity to be aware of the world," Tascan says, "and be more aware of yourself and what you're doing through your interaction with your partner. We feel like this is the 'next-gen' part. Forget the physics, forget the graphical aspect—it's being aware of more stuff, being involved in the experience."

Schneider demonstrates by walking through a virtual house set up to illustrate these concepts. We see the computer-controlled partner turn on a stereo, rock out to the tunes, and trash the living room in a rock-star-style frenzy. We see him walk to the phone and call his wife. We see him root through the occupants' dresser. We see him urinate in the tenants' coffee pot…and then put it back on the burner.

This is not your typical shooter.

HOW REAL IS TOO REAL?

But making the AI behave in a lifelike fashion, Dodens says, is not the major obstacle. "I think the hard thing will be, if we make this cool co-op play that is really great to play with a human friend—how will you be able to play that with the AI? Because if you play with a human, the human can *fail*. You're fine with the fact that you lose the game if your human friend is failing," he says, "but how are you going to feel if the computer fails and you die? That's the trickiest question we have to answer. How are we going to make the player OK with this kind of stuff happening? Because we need to have that. I know that once we get to where the player is fine with the AI failing, we will be successful."

It's this kind of unorthodox thinking that characterizes the approach the *Army of Two* team is taking. "We need to give people a new experience," says Schneider. "The genre is stale. Shooters will look better, they'll play better, the controls will be great—but it's inherently still so much of the same thing. That's why we want to create something new. We're not claiming to know 100 percent the path before us, but we need to innovate, we need to put something new into the marketplace.

"Five years ago," he continues, "if you made something that looked good or looked more impressive than anything else, you would get noticed. Now we're at a point where every game is going to have great graphics—that's the price of entry. So you can't rely on that; now it's about the experience."

"We feel that if we're not, in a meaningful way, trying to change things, games are going to be stale," Tascan says. "People are not waiting on new graphics, or even smarter AI, but being able to play differently. We're convinced that we need to push in this direction very hard, not for the sake of being different, but because we owe that to the game. We're trying to make things more exciting for us, and we hope that by making things more exciting for us we will make it more exciting for the people."

"And," Dodens says, "we will also have really nice graphics."

"Do we know exactly where we're going?" continues Tascan. "Have we figured it out to the last level? Maybe not; it would be pretentious to say that. But there are some very exciting new things going on." |

OUTSIDE THE BOX

During our visit to EA Montreal, the team demonstrated several of the unusual gameplay mechanics that have come out of the studio's unorthodox design approach (see "Steering the Juggernaut," page 52). Among these is the much-talked-about CPR segment, where one player performs CPR while the other runs away from "the light." Another involves one player controlling the breathing of his character in order to lower his heart rate so that, when the other player got in close to stick a tampon into a bullet wound, he wouldn't be sprayed in the eyes by spurting blood.

With such outlandish elements making it *into* the game, we couldn't help but wonder what ideas had been rejected. So we asked game designer Vander Caballero for some examples of what didn't make the cut.

Bow and arrow: "The camera travels with the arrow. If you hit a character, the camera goes inside the body, showing the damage you caused."

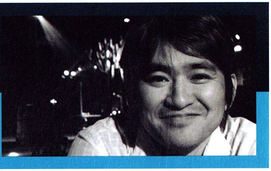
Operation: "You extract a bullet from your partner's body to save his life. My father was [shot] when I was a kid, and I've always had the fantasy of saving his life if I only could extract the bullets from his body."

3D Heads-up display: "You [use] a full 3D interface to manage all your inventory and communication. I hate 2D HUD overlays; it is old school. We can do much better than this."

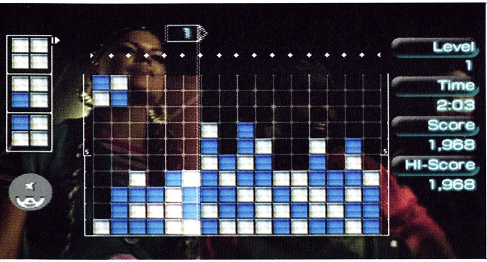
In the end, all these ideas proved too awkward, or would have required too much restructuring of the game engine.

THE MIZUGUCHI MIX

MANY MUSIC-MINDED–MASHERS FROM MIZUGUCHI



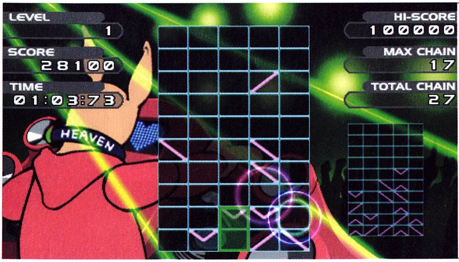
We'll fully admit that we think Tetsuya Mizuguchi is one of the more handsome fellows over in game development, and we also like how he takes simple concepts (whether wholly original or inspired by past games) and adds some quirky musical flair to them. To that end, here's the latest slew of games from him and his team over at Q Entertainment.



PUB. Buena Vista Games DEV. Q Entertainment RELEASE November PLATFORM PSP

LUMINES II

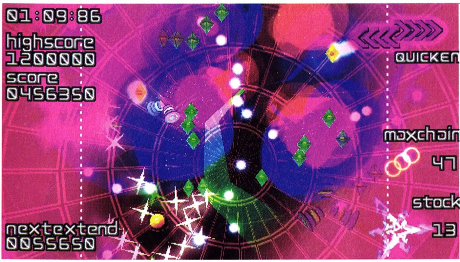
While *Lumines II* won't reinvent the wheel, it will add a new layer to the already trippy visual aesthetic: actual music videos. So you'll still be clearing blocks to the background music beat, but you'll also have crazy-looking skins, some of which feature real people singing real songs. In addition to the traditional techno-based track list, the use of music videos lets Mizuguchi insert in songs that he likes, such as Gwen Stefani's "Hollaback Girl," "Star Guitar" by the Chemical Brothers, and New Order's "Regret." Also, the videos aren't as distracting as you would think. The neatest thing, however, is the video for "Heavenly Star," which Mizuguchi and his team actually conceptualized and produced (and then had Glamoove, a video production studio, animate). The song is a supercatchy pop number, and the video uses rotoscoping à la a-ha's video for "Take On Me" (one of Mizuguchi's favorite videos).



PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Q Entertainment RELEASE October PLATFORM PSP

GUNPEY

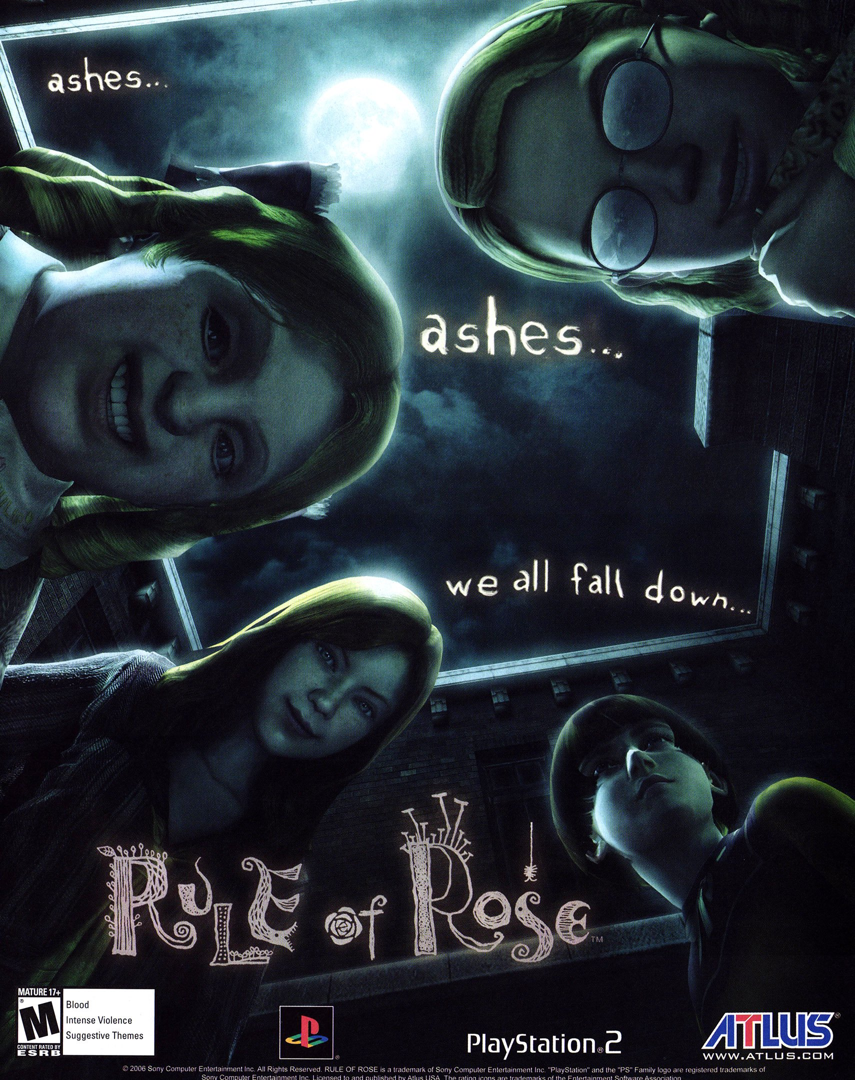
No, this isn't a shooter that's missing an "r" in the title. It's a quirky puzzle game (which originated on the WonderSwan, a weird little Japan-only handheld released during the Game Boy Color days) named after the creator of the original Game Boy, Gunpei Yokoi. The game itself is just about connecting lines. That is, there's a large five-by-10 grid on the screen, and various shapes and bars fill those columns—all you have to do is shift the shapes around (you can only move them up and down in their individual columns) to form a continuous line from left and right, which then disappears. The puzzle strategy is to not only create lines, but also to move the shapes around to create intersecting lines for combo bonuses. This new version adds lots of techno tracks and crazy background images, like people going to work in an ancient Japanese village or weird animals raving it up at night.



PUB. Buena Vista Games DEV. Q Entertainment RELEASE November PLATFORM PSP

EVERY EXTEND EXTRA

Mizuguchi was a bit unsure as to how to describe this game, but since some of us have played the odd PC freeware game *Every Extend*, we've provided a description for him: "suicide-bomb puzzler." That is, you're a little, er, suicide bomb that blows himself up (and loses a life each time) in order to trigger other explosives—creating large chain reactions racks up points, which adds lives for you. Additionally, there are "Quickens" that accelerate the speed of the incoming debris, which helps in creating larger chain reactions by having the exploding items closer to each other. As expected, Mizuguchi's touch translates into extensive use of electronica for the music and crazy use of colors and shapes for visuals. We particularly like the Versus mode, which is basically a suicide-bomb version of Ping-Pong: Two players trigger explosions to influence the movement of a giant asteroid in the middle of the screen.


ashes...
ashes...
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Blood
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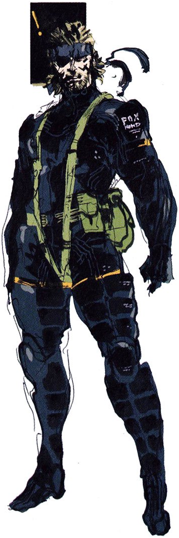
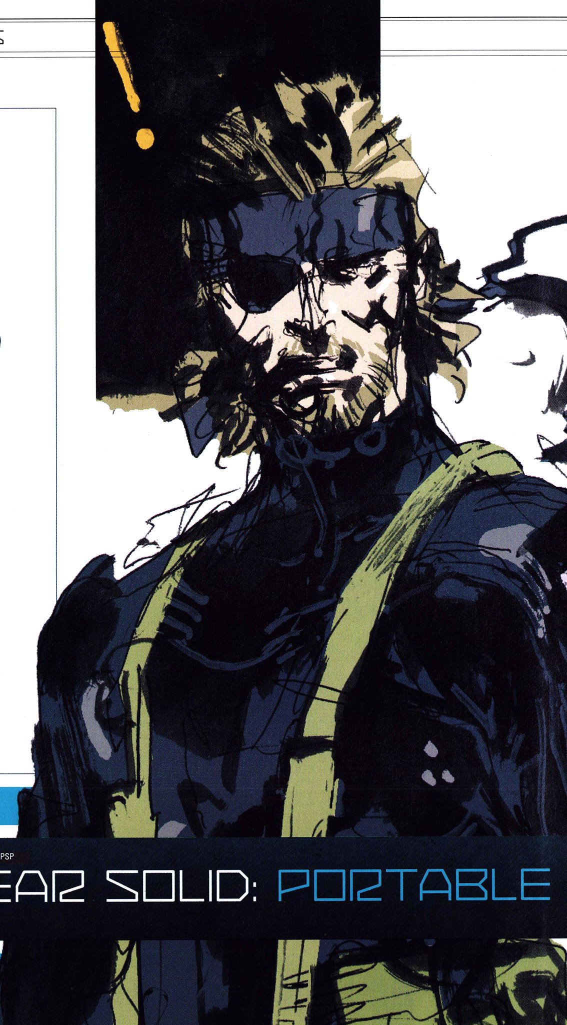


SNAKE'S AUTOGRAPH

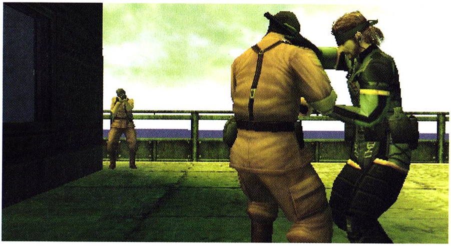
While everyone loves to play as Snake, *MGS: Portable Ops* producer Noriaki Okamura actually gives us tactical, gameplay-related reasons for why you shouldn't play as Snake all the time. No really—read the interview!

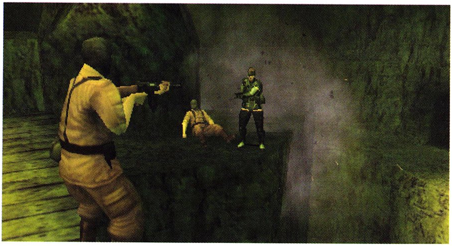


PUB. Konami DEV. Kojima Productions RELEASE Winter PLATFORM PSP

METAL GEAR SOLID: PORTABLE

PUT A SNAKE IN YOUR POCKET!





OPS

Two card-based *Metal Gear* games will have come out before the PSP gets a more "traditional" *Metal Gear Solid* title with the upcoming release of *Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops*. Series director Hideo Kojima is apparently way busy working on things like *MGS4*, but we got to talk with producer Noriaki Okamura (*Metal Gear Acid 1* and *2*) about what's going on with *Portable Ops*.

OPM We've heard Kojima comment that the genesis of Portable Ops was to have an action game where you recruited people via Wi-Fi (*The Seven Samurai* is specifically cited as the inspiration for said recruitment mechanic). Can you talk about the process of how that idea then evolved into *Portable Ops*?

NO We first started with the idea to put the next chapter of *Metal Gear Solid* on the PSP. Mr. Kojima had the idea to base the next game on the idea of recruiting comrades and integrating that with Wi-Fi play. He said that because this game is on the PSP, we should not fit a PS2-style game on the portable system, but rather create a game that is designed specifically for it. Now, of course we borrow many things from the PS2 *MGS* titles as well, but because of the portable nature of the PSP, we knew this was a perfect opportunity to encourage players to travel around their town (or the country) in search of unique characters. The game is called *Portable Ops*, meaning "portable operations," for a reason!

OPM On that note, can you elaborate on the "recruitment via Wi-Fi" gameplay mechanic?

NO In *Portable Ops*, players must first go to the recruiting mode in the game and fire up its menu. When you connect to a hot spot, you will receive a character unique to that specific hot spot. [Konami America clarified that the IP address of the hot spot is used in some crazy algorithm that generates a new character and his or her stats. —*Ed.*] If you want him or her, save the character to your memory stick and use them in single- or multiplayer modes! You needn't have to log on to any hot spots, by the way; simply detecting the hot spot is enough to be able to recruit a new member off that Internet hot spot.

There will be a variety of character types, from scientists, a variety of soldiers, and special characters—some you may recognize from *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*.

> "WHEN YOU CONNECT TO A HOT SPOT, YOU WILL RECEIVE A CHARACTER UNIQUE TO THAT SPECIFIC SPOT."

OPM OK, can you talk a bit more about the characters and their abilities?

NO Most characters have unique abilities this time. One of your comrades may be highly skilled with handguns, or rifles, or CQC [close-quarters combat]. And they'll also have negative attributes as well. For example, one of your soldiers may have a low handgun rating, causing him to have poor accuracy when he's trying to fire one.

And we are not implementing the camo-index system; we are introducing a new system that is just as innovative. In single-player mode, you will be able to take a team of up to four people with you. Based on what uniform your enemy is wearing, you'll want to control one of your teammates who is wearing a similar type of uniform. If an enemy soldier spots your look-alike comrade, he won't shoot because he thinks that would be friendly fire.

So you'll have to be very cunning in this game. And it's not always best to control Snake this time—he's easily spotted with that suit of his, and on top of that, he's a very famous character! Everybody in the game has heard of the legendary Big Boss!

| OPM **Since you just mentioned single-player, can you give us some details? Most of the press and MGS fans have only seen multiplayer gameplay so far....**
| NO Including Snake, up to four friendly characters can enter the battlefield. These comrades of yours are an essential element. Only one character can be controlled at one time, and each are first stationed at various parts of the map. Each comrade has a unique ability and weapon, so it's up to you to tackle this big map using all four characters, swapping back and forth between them and familiarizing yourself with the map. Some parts in the game will be easier with a specific character, so there's a big strategy element there as well. For example, one character may have a high sniping skill, so you'll want to bring her to the area where Snake is getting sniped at by surrounding enemies.

And of course, the rest of the game will play out like *Metal Gear Solid*, complete with Codec banter, cool cut-scenes, great drama, voice acting, et cetera.

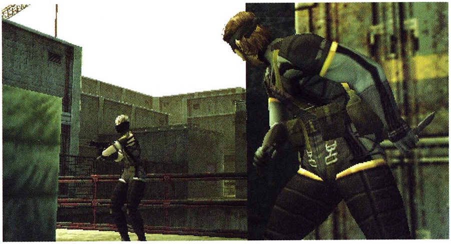
| OPM **In the single-player story line, you use Ashley Wood illustrations (accompanied with voiceovers) instead of traditional MGS-style cut-scenes. Why?**
| NO We really aimed to do something unique with this chapter of *Metal Gear Solid*, and Ashley Wood was a perfect fit. We really were impressed with his work on *Metal Gear Solid: Digital Graphic Novel*, and it just seemed logical to ask him to contribute art for *Portable Ops*. His art really fits the *MGS* world, and I'm really excited about the art that he's preparing this time around. He is really knee-deep in the project and is churning out some really stunning art for the game.

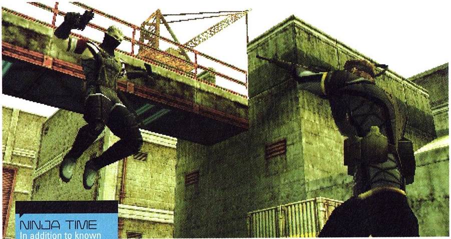
| OPM **So is this the same team that worked on MGA1 and 2? Can you talk about the background of the people working on this game?**
| NO Yes, a lot of the *MGA2* team is working on it. But since the completion of the *Acid* series, we've added so many new people to the team.

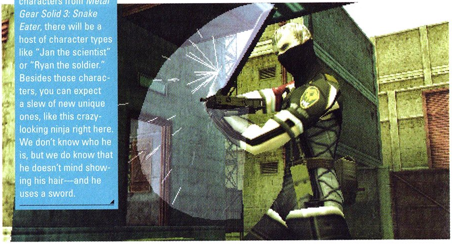
> "THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE WAS HOW TO WORK AROUND THE MISSING RIGHT ANALOG STICK."

| OPM **So, were there any specific lessons that the team learned from *MGA* that they've now applied to *Portable Ops*?**
| NO *MGA2* was a very good game with an excellent 3D graphics system. So with *Portable Ops*, we're taking that even further. I really think it's amazing how far we're pushing the PSP hardware this time. And with the *Acid* series, we really wanted to include an infrastructure-mode multiplayer mode, so with this game, now's our chance to really dive deep into that and offer an expansive online mode.

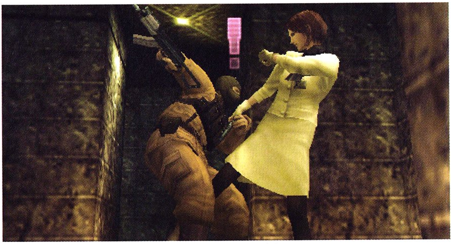
| OPM **So in the end, how was the process of making an action-oriented MGS game work on the PSP? Were there any particular challenges/difficulties in making an action-oriented Metal Gear for the PSP?**
| NO The biggest challenge was how to work around the missing right analog stick. So we've developed a gameplay system that works very well despite the lack of the right stick. This includes the new sound indicator, which informs players of their surroundings based on sound. Because players can't simply pan the camera around using the PSP, the sound indicator responds based on the noises nearby enemies make. It won't tell you what just made that sound around the corner, but it will tell you somebody or something is moving in that area. It's a really great take on the classic hide-and-seek formula of *MGS*. |







NINJA TIME
In addition to known characters from *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, there will be a host of character types like "Jan the scientist" or "Ryan the soldier." Besides those characters, you can expect a slew of new unique ones, like this crazy-looking ninja right here. We don't know who he is, but we do know that he doesn't mind showing his hair—and he uses a sword.



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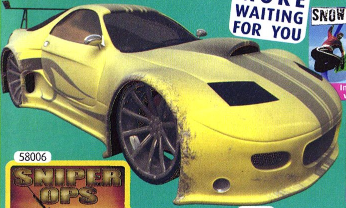


58001

SNOWBOARD FURY
Interactive

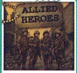
Impress the betties with your carving

58002

SRW
STREET RACE WORLD 3D

Multiple circuits, cars to unlock, instant replay and multiple viewing angles

58003



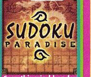
Control an elite platoon trough WWII missions

58004

Kazi's Labyrinth

Help the dragon escape from prison

58005



Carry this mind-bender everywhere

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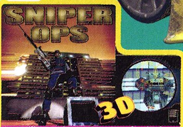

As a military sniper, you protect the city from murderous terrorists

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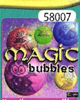

Keep the pressure off by thinking quickly

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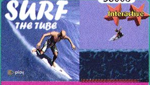

Catch a wave in this Surfing Competition

58009

Sexy Strip Poker

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58027	GRILLZ
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58029	LAFFY TAFFY
58030	MS. NEW BOOTY
58031	MY BOO
58032	OH
58033	RIDIN´
58034	SNAP YO FINGERS
58035	STILL TIPPIN
58036	TEMPERATURE
58037	WHAT YOU KNOW
58038	WHEN YOU´RE MAD
58039	YO (EXCUSE ME MISS)
THEME	
58040	JAMES BOND - 007
58041	PINK PANTHER
58042	SUPER MARIO BROTHERS THEME
POP	
58043	DAUGHTERS
58044	MY HUMPS
58045	PON DE REPLAY
58046	SHE WILL BE LOVED
58047	STUPID GIRL
58048	YOURE BEAUTIFUL
ROCK	
58049	A LITTLE LESS SIXTEEN, A LITTLE MORE TOUCH YOU
58050	B.Y.O.B
58051	BASKET CASE
58052	BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY
58053	BORN TO BE WILD
58054	BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS
58055	DANCE, DANCE
58056	DIRTY LITTLE SECRET
58057	GRAND THEFT AUTUMN (WHERE IS YOUR BOY)
58058	I WRITE SINS NOT TRAGEDIES
58059	MOVE ALONG
58060	MR. BRIGHTSIDE
58061	PHOTOGRAPH
58062	SAVIN´ ME
58063	SOMEBODY TOLD ME
58064	SUGAR, WE´RE GOING DOWN
58065	WAKE ME UP WHEN SEPTEMBER ENDS
58066	WHO SAYS YOU CAN´T GO HOMEE

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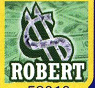

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HELLO
my name is

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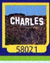

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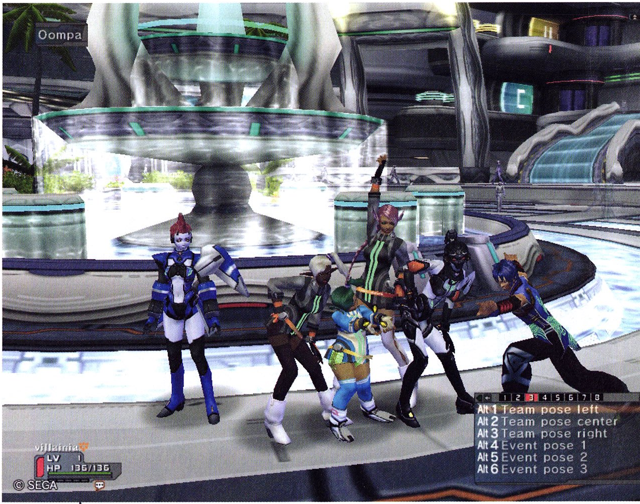


PUB. Sega DEV. Sonic Team RELEASE Fall PLATFORM PS2

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

FIVE MEN–CHILDREN LOCKED UP IN A ROOM TOGETHER

Rather than just tell you about *PSU* and its combination of single- and multiplayer, we just left a tape recorder on during our exclusive multiplayer session. This was an intermagazine effort, as we had senior editor Darren Gladstone from *CGW* (playing on the PC), executive editor Shane Bettenhausen and previews editor Bryan Intihar from *EGM* (playing on the Xbox 360), and Team *OPM*, as represented by Scooter and Giancarlo.

INITIAL CHARACTER RACE SELECTION

OPM Scooter: Okay, the CASTs (robots) look cool, but I gotta go with making a Beast, which seems to be some sort of space furry. Apparently, as a space furry, I can punch things better.

OPM GV: I have to go with the CASTs on this one. That's all I used in *PSO* and I'll be damned if I change for the likes of you! Plus you can make cool robot ninjas.

EGM Bryan: I'll stick to doing humans. This way, I can keep up my metrosexual look online as well.

CGW Darren: There you have it, folks: Bryan sticks to doing humans. Me? I'm getting in touch with my fembot Real Doll side as a CAST.

EGM Shane: I'm sticking with a Newman…they make the best magic users. Plus, the chicks are smokin' hot.

MESSING WITH OUR APPEARANCE

OPM Scooter: I'm *not* going to make my Beast hot. Besides messing with the hair and face stuff (typical in an RPG), I'm messing with the body width and height to turn her into a horrible Oompa-Loompa.

CGW Darren: Man, this is tougher than I thought. Do I go with the soul patrol Afro or a Beckham fauxhawk on my robotic hottie? Hmmm….

EGM Bryan: I'm totally going the Beckham look, but it's nice to see that I have options if one day I decide to go the way of a fatty.

OPM GV: I'm going for the robot ninja look. Because robot ninjas will f*** you up!

EGM Shane: Wow, *PSU* offers a lot more customization than *PSO* ever did…some of these hairstyles are truly evil. I think I could just sit here and whip up futuristic skanks all day long….

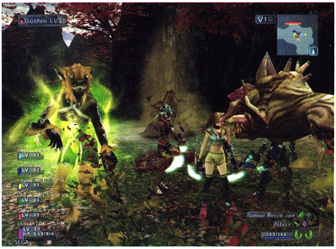
MEETING UP FOR OUR FIRST MISSION

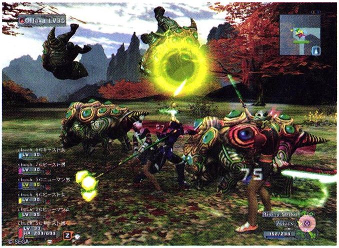
CGW Darren: This city sure looks nice on my PC. Not nearly as pixelated as…say, how many GB of RAM are on this machine and is it using one graphics card or two in SLI? Hello? Where'd everyone go?

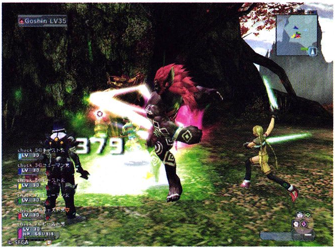
EGM Shane: This city area seems pretty large…having voice chat on the Xbox 360 version will make navigating this oversized mall mezzanine a hell of a lot easier. Sucks to be a PS2 gamer, Scooter.

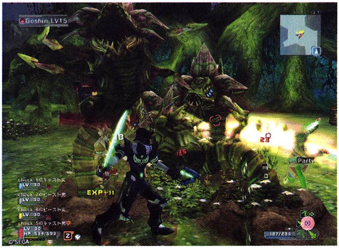
OPM Scooter: Yeah, while there are a variety of canned sayings that I can use the shoulder buttons for, it looks like I'll have to either plug in a keyboard or hit you guys up via three-way calling. Oh, looks like everyone is heading over to some big gate-looking thing.

EGM Bryan: Yeah, we all gotta enter through there and then wait for the group leader to start the mission.









OPM GV: While waiting, I'll just keep spamming the "victory" pose while chasing Scooter around.

MISSION ONE — JUST KILL THINGS IN DUNGEON

EGM Shane: I really like the changes they've made to the combat—it's more visceral, the combo strings are longer, and Forces now have mad technique points…I'm tossing spells with reckless abandon! Actually, I think I'll just scout ahead and gather some treasure for the party; every party needs a "banker"!

OPM GV: Agreed. This is definitely an improvement on all fronts. The combos are really easy to execute and it just feels like there's more you can do in melee combat. Long-range stuff still needs a little work in terms of locking onto enemies. And yeah, remind me never to play this game with you ever again, *EGM* Shane.

EGM Bryan: I'm totally digging the ability to have a melee weapon in one hand and a gun in the other.

CGW Darren: I actually don't mind the controls on the PC. Combat works—if a little on the mindless button-mashing side…waaaait a sec! *PSU* supports a 360 controller on the PC? Not bad.

OPM Scooter: Yeah, it's pretty easy to kill things no matter what platform you're playing on. As for your earlier point, GV, I think that the next time we do a session, we should set up loot rules to prevent dorks like Shane from ninja-ing everything while we actually, you know, fight things.

MISSION ONE — BOSS FIGHT

OPM Scooter: Hey, let's just run up to this slightly-bigger-than-the-other-enemies thing and hit it!

CGW Darren: Time to make with the hack and the slash. As soon as I write a macro, I will totally rule this game online.

OPM GV: Er, I'll just keep on with the slashing and/or the hacking….

EGM Shane: And I'll keep picking up the loot that it drops!

EGM Bryan: What a f***ing prick!

CHANGING CHARACTERS

EGM Bryan: OK, nuff of these wimpy characters—let's test out some level 30 characters and see what kind of damage they can do.

CGW Darren: Is it just me or does my Beast character look a little like Skeletor's sidekick Beastman?

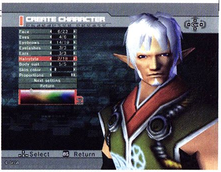
EGM Shane: Man, I bet a lot of dudes are going to pick Beastmen characters because they can 'roid out and change shape…I think I'll pass on that loser bandwagon.

OPM GV: The Beastman thing was a bit of a surprise, especially since my character appears to be a little elf-looking girl, but it could be helpful since her default attacks seem to be a little weak.

OPM Scooter: I'm now controlling some sort of saucy female CAST. Right now, I'm considered a "hunter," which meant that I'm better with guns than melee weapons. Cool, I can now stand by while the rest of you clowns run up and get all Beasty with the monsters.

HEY FOLKS!

We've actually have yet to play the single-player portion of *PSU*, and are assuming that these happy folk are characters from the single-player. Get ready to put names to faces when you get the game.



CREATE CHARACTER

Face 6/23
Eyes 4/6
Eyebrows 14/19
Eyelashes 3/3
Ears 3/3
Hairstyle 2/18
Body suit 5/5
Skin color
Proportions
Next setting
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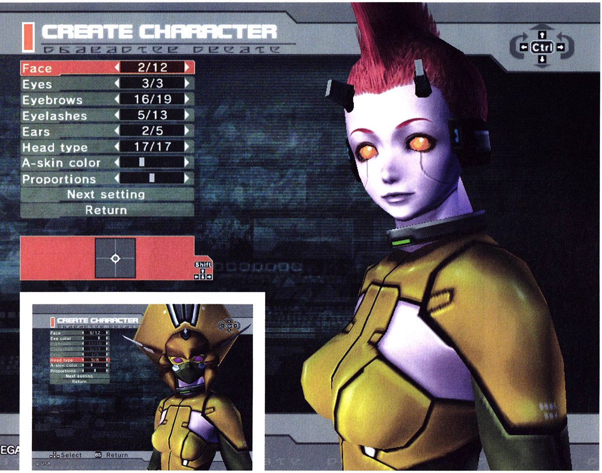

CREATE CHARACTER

Face 2/12
Eyes 3/3
Eyebrows 16/19
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Head type 17/17
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Proportions
Next setting
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CREATE CHARACTER

Face 6/12
Eye color
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Head type 5/8
A-skin color
Proportions
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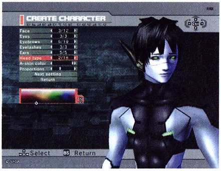

CREATE CHARACTER

Face 3/12
Eyes 3/3
Eyebrows 6/19
Eyelashes 3/3
Ears 5/5
Head type 2/18
A-skin color
Proportions
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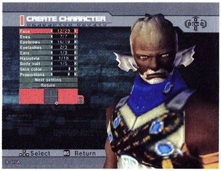
Return



CREATE CHARACTER

Face 12/23
Eyes 7/7
Eyebrows 16/19
Eyelashes 2/3
Ears 1/3
Hairstyle 1/18
Body suit 1/5
Skin color
Proportions
Next setting
Return

CHECKING OUT OUR NEW CHARACTER PADS

CGW Darren: Welcome to *PSU Cribs*! You like my fully pimped space joint? Aww, yeah! See that giant 'shroom? Got that at a Dead show in 2076. One of a kind, man.

OPM GV: Wait, what are you talking about? Get away from me Darren, and let me move my space shrub from one end of my apartment to the other in peace.

EGM Bryan: Guys, you can't forget to spend some QT with your new Partner Machinery. These things basically replace *PSO*'s mags, and if evolved correctly, can join you on the battlefield as little AI robots.

OPM Scooter: My little maid-shaped Partner Machine looks like she wants some attention, but I'm busy checking out my new threads.

EGM Shane: Aw, I can't spend the money I, er, collected for the group to get new outfits!

MISSION TWO

OPM GV: Whoa, OK. I have a few different weapons here. These little dual dagger things are cool, but I think I'll stick with the double sword setup for now, though I'm missing the CAST's rifle.

EGM Shane: Wow, check out all the new weapon types...and I'm guessing that the combo strings for these new types require different timing. Increased complexity! I'm in love.

EGM Bryan: OK, will these monsters ever freakin' die? I hope not every single critter on the harder difficulties takes this long to slaughter, even with our buffed-up characters.

CGW Darren: Since we're cheating, I'll pretend that I actually earned half this cool gear. Compared to my CAST, this Beast has some very cool varieties of blades. Try dual-wielding daggers and using the combos. You'll thank me later.

OPM Scooter: Hey, you can do zany combos with your "daggers" and "swords" all you want, but I like modifying my rifle to shoot freezing shots from afar, which help for crowd control as I freeze multiple baddies while you guys keep up with the stabbystab.

MISSION TWO — WE DISCOVER COOL ABILITIES

CGW Darren: P-U-R-P-L-E R-A-G-E! Dude, nothing can stop me!

EGM Bryan: That's right—do your thing, Mr. Purple People Eater.

OPM GV: For you newbies, Darren just used a "nanoblast," which is fancy *PSU*-speak for "Beast Hulks out." When I use it, I'm some sort of big cheetah thing that flips and scratches and deals out mad damage.

EGM Shane: Again, as I said earlier, I think this weird Hulk fantasy is going to get a lot of kids playing Beast characters, and I'm expressing my counterculture by playing a good ol' fashion human.

OPM Scooter: Hey, I'm using a CAST, which has the weirdly-named SUV attack. It's not a transformation à la the Beast, it's a nifty looking one-shot attack that delivers a ton of damage to pretty much all baddies within range. Plus my hot robogirl turns into a big gun, and I'd rather be Megatron than Beastmaster.

MISSION TWO – THE BOSS

OPM Scooter: Oh crap, this thing flies. I guess since I'm a hunter I should be using my guns. I'll try my trusty freezing shot rifle; I don't think the boss will be frozen, but at least I can still stay far away and do decent damage.

EGM Bryan: Yeah, switching to a first-person perspective (which is new to the series) helps you shoot with pinpoint accuracy. I quickly made that thing's wings look like Swiss cheese.

CGW Darren: First person is nice, true, but I think it's a little weak. You're stuck in one place and aim with the left stick? Everyone is used to aiming with the right analog stick by now. Hell, why not let you just play the whole game in that mode if you want?

EGM Shane: You guys keep bickering; I'll keep looting!

OPM GV: Whatever, Shane. And wait a second—I remember this boss from the original *Phantasy Star Online*! Oh well, fighting big dragons is cool anyway. And we're out. KTHXBYE!

INTERPLATFORM LOVE

As mentioned earlier, editors of various Ziff-Davis publications all played together in the same session. Meaning that the PC guy and the Xbox 360 guys and the PS2 guys all sat in the same room and killed the same creatures together. Hooray for unity!

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PLAYSTATION UNDERGROUND

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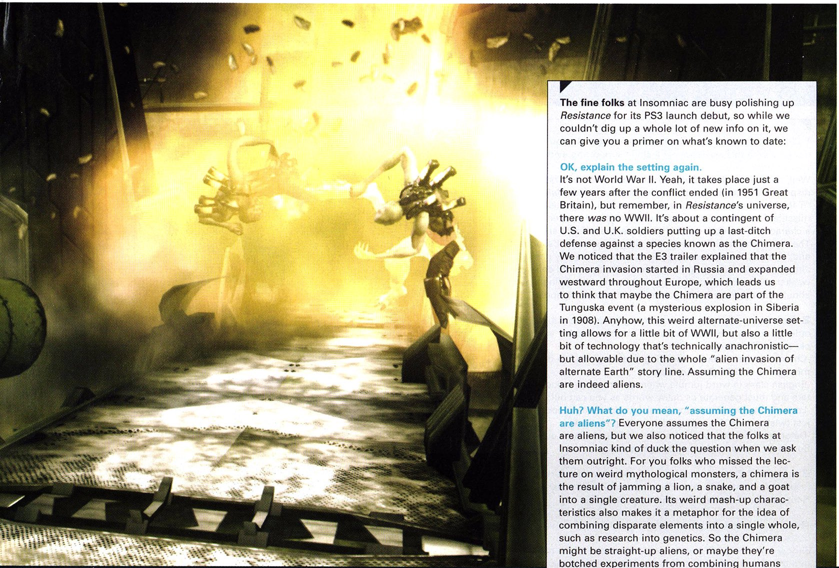
PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Insomniac RELEASE PS3 Launch PLATFORM PS3

RESISTANCE: FALL

WE CAN'T RESIST ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS



OF MAN

The fine folks at Insomniac are busy polishing up *Resistance* for its PS3 launch debut, so while we couldn't dig up a whole lot of new info on it, we can give you a primer on what's known to date:

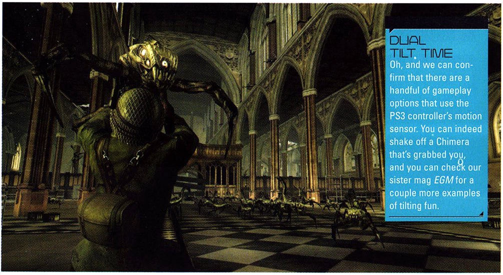
OK, explain the setting again.
It's not World War II. Yeah, it takes place just a few years after the conflict ended (in 1951 Great Britain), but remember, in *Resistance*'s universe, there *was* no WWII. It's about a contingent of U.S. and U.K. soldiers putting up a last-ditch defense against a species known as the Chimera. We noticed that the E3 trailer explained that the Chimera invasion started in Russia and expanded westward throughout Europe, which leads us to think that maybe the Chimera are part of the Tunguska event (a mysterious explosion in Siberia in 1908). Anyhow, this weird alternate-universe setting allows for a little bit of WWII, but also a little bit of technology that's technically anachronistic—but allowable due to the whole "alien invasion of alternate Earth" story line. Assuming the Chimera are indeed aliens.

Huh? What do you mean, "assuming the Chimera are aliens"? Everyone assumes the Chimera are aliens, but we also noticed that the folks at Insomniac kind of duck the question when we ask them outright. For you folks who missed the lecture on weird mythological monsters, a chimera is the result of jamming a lion, a snake, and a goat into a single creature. Its weird mash-up characteristics also makes it a metaphor for the idea of combining disparate elements into a single whole, such as research into genetics. So the Chimera might be straight-up aliens, or maybe they're botched experiments from combining humans with, er, something else. Whatever they are, their technology is wacky, and it allows for zany weapons to stand alongside traditional ones.

So what's the coolest gun *OPM* has heard about?
We're kind of conflicted, as we like both the Bullseye (with its crazy homing bullets), and the Augur (which either bores its way through enemies or does the complete opposite by creating a strong barrier to shield yourself with). So far, we've also heard about standby weapons with a twist, like the rocket launcher where you can stop the rocket in midair and manually guide it to your target. Finally, we haven't seen the "explosive goop gun" in action, but we still like it.

OK, and when I'm done plugging the Chimera, what next?
How does 40-person objective-based multiplayer sound? That's where masses of players use teamwork to hold onto specific node points on a map. For those of you who hate other people and just want to spend your time in an antisocial manner, there's always deathmatch.

Sounds neat. So what's the coolest thing *OPM* has seen so far? Seeing a big nasty spider-mech-Chimera thing jump out and take up our screen, roar at us, and then spew explosive goop onto us.



DUAL TILT TIME

Oh, and we can confirm that there are a handful of gameplay options that use the PS3 controller's motion sensor. You can indeed shake off a Chimera that's grabbed you, and you can check our sister mag *EGM* for a couple more examples of tilting fun.

PUB. Rockstar Games DEV. Rockstar Vancouver RELEASE Fall PLATFORM PS2

BULLY

TIME'S UP, PENS DOWN! TURN IN YOUR MIDTERM AND BLUE BOOKS!

1 *Bully* is often cited as a Columbine simulator. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment? Include supporting evidence in your answer.

Well, no one can die in *Bully*, which makes that the first fact that disproves the Columbine simulation theory. In fact, *Bully* is rated "T for Teen," and one of the stated features is "lighthearted mischief," which means that the worst that can happen is that a character is knocked out. Furthermore, there aren't any guns. The "weapons" include things like slingshots, water balloons, and, at most, firecrackers. *Bully* is a story about a boy named Jimmy Hopkins who goes to Bullworth Academy and defends weaker children from bullies, and is a far cry from being a game about plotting and executing a murderous shooting spree.

2 *Bully* is filled with its fair share of lighthearted combat. List other gameplay mechanics that don't involve combat (one point per mechanic listed):

-Chemistry class (a button-pushing rhythm game à la dance minigames in *GTA: San Andreas*)
-English class (a word jumble where you're given a pool of letters and must generate as many words as you can out of them)
-Lock picking (whenever you break into someone's locker, you just twist around the analog stick to open the lock)
-Detention (repetitive activities like mowing the lawn outside of Bullworth Academy that are designed to be no fun)

3 In each of *Bully's* five chapters, a specific clique serves as the focus of said chapter. List all five cliques (one point per clique):

Nerds, Jocks, Greasers, Dropouts, and Preppies

4 Using your knowledge of combat, puzzles, story, and cliques, describe one mission.

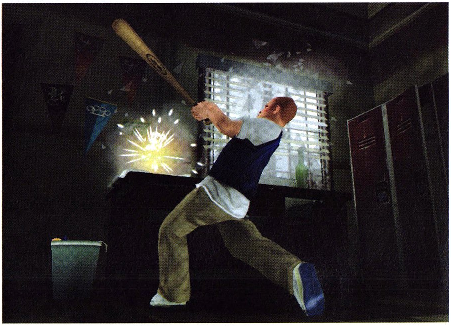
Jimmy is minding his own business when one of the nerds tells him that Randall, another nerd, was last spotted in the toolshed (where shop class is held) and hasn't been seen since. Jimmy goes to investigate only to see a random bully beating up on Randall. Jimmy, using a combat system that has its roots in brawler games like *The Warriors*, steps in to defend Randall. Besides using punches and holds, Jimmy can also perform humiliation moves like Indian burns and dead arms to finish off the bully. When Jimmy dispatches the bully, Randall thanks him and not only does Jimmy have more influence with the nerds, but he's also earned a skateboard as a mission reward. Afterward, Jimmy must try to make it to class on time, or else be captured by a prefect for truancy.

5 Describe a mission that may or may not involve comic mischief, but definitely does not involve violence.

Jimmy runs into a gym teacher outside of an adult novelty store (while most of *Bully* takes place within Bullworth Academy, Jimmy can venture into the town surrounding Bullworth at times), and said teacher gives Jimmy a mission: retrieve five pairs of panties from the girls' dormitory. To do so, Jimmy has to wait until after curfew, sneak around campus without getting caught by patrolling prefects, find a way into the girls' dorm, and then search for and grab the undergarments without being caught. This mission is modeled after classic panty raid scenes of various movies.

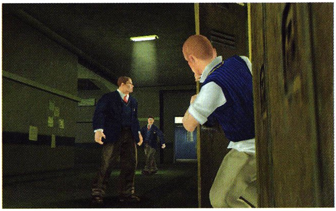
6 List the films that are cited as influences to the atmosphere of *Bully*. For extra credit, include the title of a novel that was also influential.

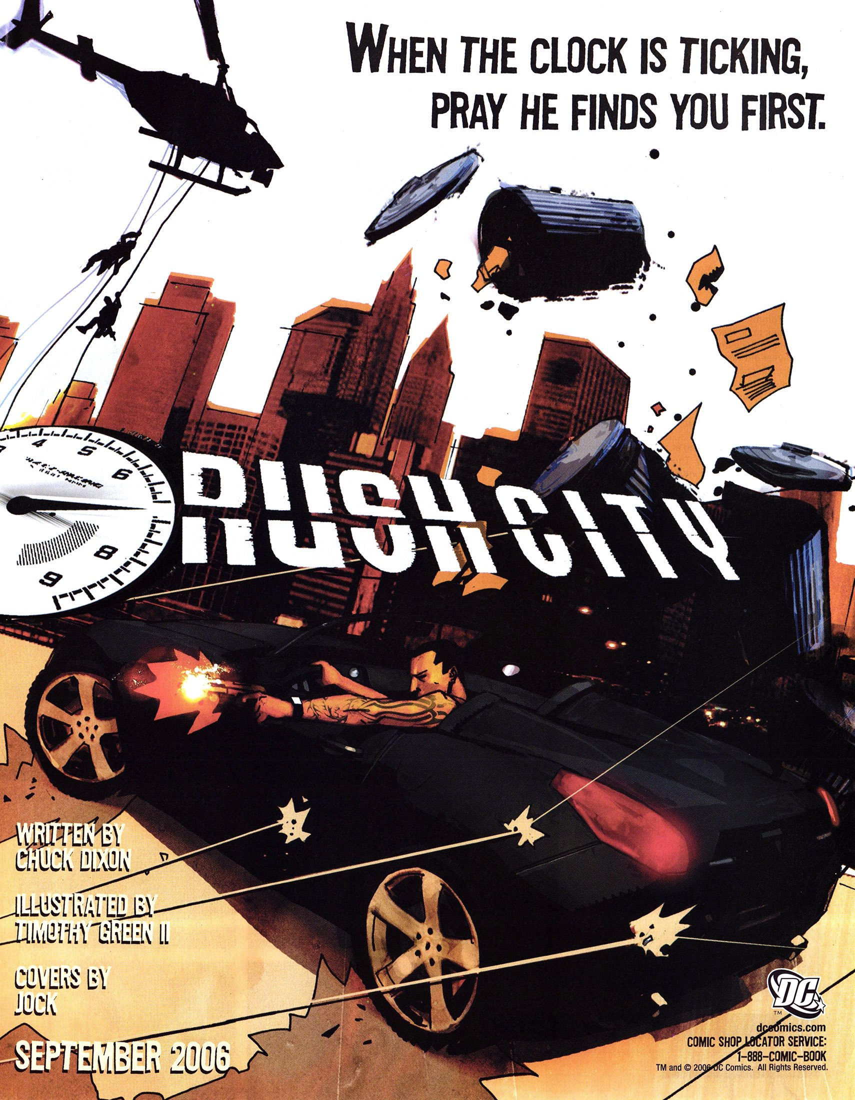
Fast Times at Ridgemont High, Rushmore, The Breakfast Club
Extra credit: *The Catcher in the Rye*



GTA METER

Similar to *GTA*, *Bully* has an authority-response meter of sorts. Rather than use star ratings, *Bully* has a meter that rises whenever you do something seriously uncool. As the meter rises, the chances of a prefect finding you and putting you in detention also rise.




WHEN THE CLOCK IS TICKING,
PRAY HE FINDS YOU FIRST.

RUSH CITY

WRITTEN BY
CHUCK DIXON

ILLUSTRATED BY
TIMOTHY GREEN II

COVERS BY
JOCK

SEPTEMBER 2006

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PUB. Rockstar Games DEV. Rockstar Leeds/Rockstar North RELEASE October PLATFORM PSP

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY STORIES

HAULIN' ASS WITH HALL & OATES IN YOUR POCKET

OK, we know you don't have a lot of time in your day to read a droning story about the next *GTA* title for the PSP, so we broke this preview down into a quick-reading cheat sheet, which is best read with "Karma Chameleon" blasting in the background.

WHO: Remember that guy who gets clipped during a drug deal with Tommy Vercetti during the beginning of *GTA: Vice City*? That happens to be Victor Vance—who shares Lance's (your buddy from *GTA: Vice City*) last name due to being his brother. Victor is a 28-year-old marine, which is interesting because he's the first *GTA* main character to not have a criminal background (the *GTA3* guy just got out of jail, Tommy Vercetti was part of the Forelli family, CJ was part of the Grove Street Families gang, and Toni Cipriani was a Leone family capo). Rockstar is mum on details, but we can guess that Lance initiates Vic into crime.

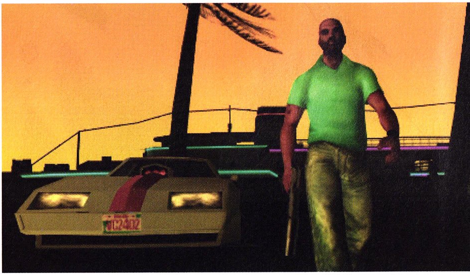
WHERE: Vic is stationed at Vice City while waiting for his transfer to Guantanamo Bay. The physical size of Vice City makes it twice as large as the version of Liberty City featured in *GTA: Liberty City Stories*. Along with being bigger, it'll look much better, as the developers have a better handle on PSP technology and have been able to significantly increase the draw distance for *Vice City Stories*.

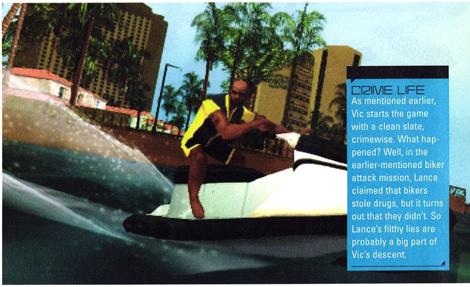
WHEN: *GTA: Vice City* took place in 1986, and much like how *Liberty City Stories* was a prequel to *GTA3*, *Vice City Stories* will also be a prequel to its PS2 counterpart, taking place in 1984. Rockstar hasn't finalized a track list, but we totally want to cruise around and cause trouble to the sounds of "When Doves Cry," "Footloose," or at least "99 Luftballons." Since it takes place in 1984, assume that a few buildings from *GTA: Vice City* are going to be "works-in-progress" in *Vice City Stories'* version of town.

> VICTOR VANCE IS THE FIRST GTA MAIN CHARACTER TO NOT HAVE A CRIMINAL BACKGROUND...

WHY: *GTA: Vice City* is often mentioned as the fan-favorite *GTA* title, which is probably due to a combination of its '80s nostalgia and pastel-heavy visuals. So it makes sense for Rockstar to take what it learned from *Liberty City Stories* (which the developers cite as a "total rookie first-gen PSP title") and apply it to *Vice City*. Vast improvements over *Liberty City Stories* include increased draw distance, smoother animations, and less "clumping" (when a bunch of the same character model shows up in one place).

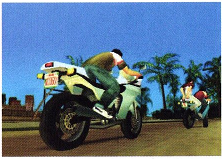
HOW: Expect it to play much like *Liberty City Stories*—at first. Rockstar has made the missions feel less like "go from point A to point B" affairs, instead designing them to use various skills. One has Vic being a stuntman for a movie; he had to first zip around on a Jet Ski (a new addition) before hopping off and performing a crazy car chase. Another had Vic flying a helicopter (new to PSP versions of *GTA*) while Lance manned the guns during an attack on a biker gang. We'll get some hands-on time later. |

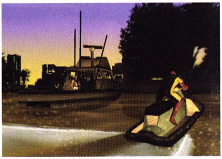


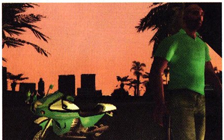


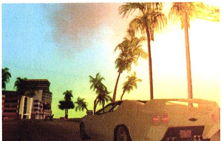
CRIME LIFE

As mentioned earlier, Vic starts the game with a clean slate, crimewise. What happened? Well, in the earlier-mentioned biker attack mission, Lance claimed that bikers stole drugs, but it turns out that they didn't. So Lance's filthy lies are probably a big part of Vic's descent.









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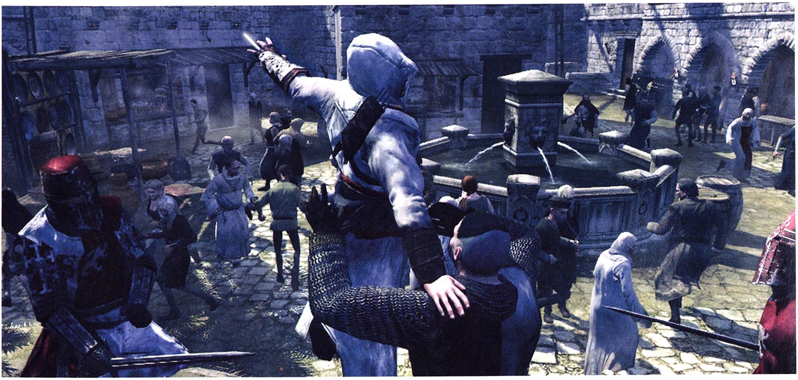
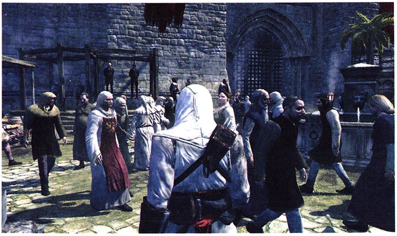
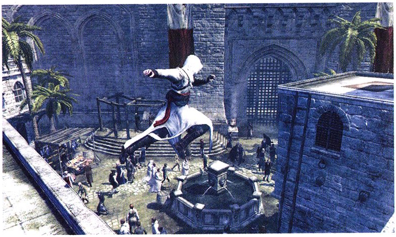


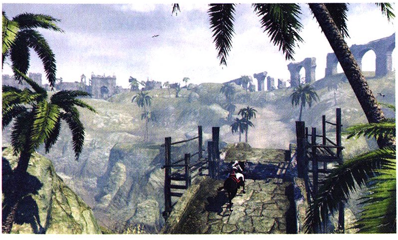
PUB. Ubisoft **DEV.** Ubisoft **RELEASE** 2007 **PLATFORM** PS3

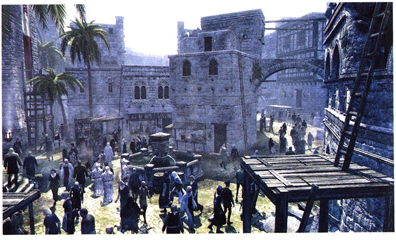
ASSASSIN'S CREED

SEPARATING CHURCH AND GAME









Games about being criminals, much less assassins, are pretty much old hat. Sure, they may stir the ire of politicians, but they don't surprise or shock us that much anymore. What makes the premise of Ubisoft's *Assassin's Creed* more surprising than most isn't just that you play an assassin, but that you play as an assassin in the middle of a very volatile time period that still has resonance today. Namely, the Third Crusade in the 12th century, where Christian Crusaders led by Richard the Lionheart attempted to reclaim the holy city of Jerusalem from the Muslim Saracens led by Saladin. Additionally, since the assassins in the game are based on the historical Hashshashin, a secretive Muslim sect of assassins, one might get the impression that the game features a Muslim killing Christians. Uh-oh.

After hearing about the overall theme of *AC*, however, we see that Ubisoft Montreal is treating the subject matter similarly to how Ridley Scott did in his 2005 film *Kingdom of Heaven*. That is, quite even-handedly and with nary a pro-/anti- Islamic/Christian message. Instead *Assassin's Creed* focuses on a larger, more universal message that is belief-free. In fact, the game's message is "stop fighting." *AC's* scriptwriter, Corey May, elaborates on this: "As the Saracens and Crusaders battle one another for control, the assassins are working to find a way to end the hostilities. They see the war as pointless. There is no reason Crusaders and Saracens should not coexist in peace. The assassins are not allied with either side of the conflict, nor are they driven by a desire for profit or power. They are also not interested in furthering a religious agenda. In fact, they are generally opposed to most forms of organized religion. [As mentioned earlier, the assassins in the game were inspired by the real-life Hashshashin, but creative license means that they don't have to be strict believers like the historical assassins. —*Ed.*] This means that the Crusaders (and the Saracens) are not the assassins' true enemy. War is—as are those who exploit it. So to sum up: The assassins are fighting to end the Third Crusade. Along the way, they will discover a mysterious group that stands to gain a great deal by prolonging and intensifying the war. Once this enemy is discovered, it will be up to Altair [the main character] and his assassin brothers to stop them."

ASSASSIN'S CREED FOCUSES ON A LARGER, MORE UNIVERSAL MESSAGE THAT IS BELIEF-FREE.

Where does Altair fit in? He starts off the game as a "disgraced master assassin" (May's words) who is assigned the aforementioned hefty task of ending the Third Crusade. To do so, Altair will focus on eliminating high-profile leaders—generals and strategists on both sides who are prolonging the conflict. As Altair continues to search for, assess, and then flawlessly execute—in public—each target, he'll also encounter elements of the counterconspiracy who want the Third Crusade to continue. Our guess is that since producer Jade Raymond herself told us that the Altair's quest has ramifications that affect us to this very day, the counterconspiracy is probably a group of weird Illuminati types who have lasted from the Crusades until today. In fact, there's a popular theory floating around the Internet that you play as Altair's descendent who's using "genetic memory" to experience Altair's exploits as a master assassin in order to take on these mysterious counterconspiracy fellows in the present day. This same theory also explains that the "computer offline" message that comes up when Altair dies is an homage to the Prince of Persia's "misremembering" his story whenever he dies in *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time*. Whichever of these theories is true (or even if neither theory is true), it seems like *Assassin's Creed* is trying to duck unneeded controversy and focus on creating a worthy next-gen game—not a game mired by critics who think it's about a fundamentalist killing other fundamentalists.

KNIGHT

FACTION FUN
Part of *Assassin's Creed*'s core gameplay is "stealth via crowds," where you use people instead of shadows to hide in. What helps is to do side missions that help out various groups, so that group then returns the favor. For example, beggars will impede chasing knights, and priests (that you resemble) will let you pray with them.

PRIEST

BEGGAR

INDEPENDENTS
△○×□

illustration by Nate VanDykl

INDEPENDENTS' DAY

FOR THESE DEVELOPERS, THE PRICE OF FREEDOM IS WORTH IT

The phrase "independent development studio" might conjure up an image of a few guys working together in a garage, banging out a game. But the reality is that independent development covers a wide range of realities. One thing they all share, however, is a desire to make games. We talked with several of the top independent studios to find out what it's like being on their own.

"Independence was the main thing I was looking for when I left my job at a publisher," says Tim Schafer, the founder of Double Fine Productions. "I was tired of not being able to build a team the way I wanted to, treat them like I thought they should be treated, and then hang on to them for the next game."

Ryan Geithman, president of Snowblind Studios, was in a similar position. "[Brian Sostrom and I] weren't happy for various reasons at the companies we had worked at previously and decided it was time to head out on our own," he says.

Other teams just ended up on their own by accident. Julian Eggebrecht, president and creative director of Factor 5, says, "Factor 5 started as a hobby in the late '80s in Germany, never intentionally trying to make a living with it. When our first games were received well and sold a lot, we had to make the decision—continue as a hobby and eventually stop making games or plunge headfirst into the risk."

Regardless of how they got to where they are, everyone feels that their situation lends them a certain advantage. Ted Price, CEO and president of Insomniac Games, says, "Certainly I know many people at Insomniac came here because we *are* independent—we, not a corporate parent, decide what games we're going to make. We all discuss and collaborate on the things we do."

Pandemic Studios CEO Andrew Goldman agrees. "Pandemic can build a culture that is purely focused on fostering the creative spirit," he says. "You're also a bit of an underdog in the industry, and you have to be scrappy to survive."

"The benefit is a team that is much more cohesive and much more like a family," says Schafer, then asks, "Is that cheesy? Isn't it always the cheesy boss who says, 'We're just like a family here.'?"

However, there is a real world to deal with outside of the family. Publishers are a necessary part of bringing a game to life, and it's understandable that, since they have a financial stake in the success of a title, they will want to be part of the creative process. And that can sometimes lead to friction. Geithman says, "Some developers with owners that are wealthy are able to push things a bit and gain more control, but for most developers out there this is a tough business to be in if you want total creative freedom. Having said that, I think it's possible, over time, to put your studio in a better and better position."

It's key for a publisher and developer to be able to communicate clearly. "Even if you may not have *full* control of the destiny of the content, there must be a level of understanding to where things can benefit both sides of the party," explains Tetsuya Mizuguchi, chief creative officer at Q Entertainment. "Taking that initiative is what's important."

And having a successful title on the shelf gives independent studios a solid piece of evidence to help them defend their creative choices. Johan Kristiansson, CEO of Starbreeze Studios, says, "Since our success with *The Chronicles of Riddick* in 2004, we have been fortunate enough to have several different options for new potential projects, which means that we have been given a great deal of creative freedom. We have also felt that our publishers have more faith in our ideas during our current *Darkness* production.

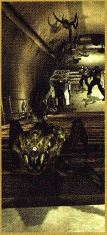
> "PUBLISHERS WANT HIT GAMES, BUT THAT'S WHAT WE WANT TOO."

Ultimately, it's important to remember that everyone is working toward the same goal. "Publishers just want to make hit games, but that's what we independent game developers want to do, too," Schafer says. "We just want to do it creatively. So the two desires are not in opposition to each other. But you have to find a publishing partner who is interested in innovation, and you have to work hard to explain why your game is going to be such a big hit, even if it is not a *GTA* clone with a movie license attached."

Studios also have to be able to convince publishers why they are the right fit for a specific title. For example, if a studio has primarily made racing games, then it can be difficult for it to convince a company to fund the production of a genre outside of racing. Factor 5, whose résumé includes the *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron* series, dealt with that by building on its experience. "When we moved away from *Star Wars*, we consciously focused on our strengths when we did the early designs for *Lair*," Eggebrecht says. "In the end, the theme of the game really was a natural fit for what we did best, so there never was a creative clash."

THE PARTICIPANTS

Factor 5
Julian Eggebrecht,
President and Creative Director



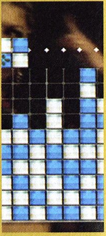
Insomniac Games
Ted Price,
CEO and President

Pandemic Studios
Andrew Goldman,
CEO

Snowblind Studios
Ryan Geithman,
President

Starbreeze Studios
Johan Kristiansson,
CEO

Double Fine Productions
Tim Schafer,
Founder



Q Entertainment
Tetsuya Mizuguchi,
Chief Creative Officer,

Another way that a team can buy itself more creative freedom is to hang on to the ownership rights of an intellectual property. Price says, "One great thing about retaining the rights to a successful IP is that it creates tangible value for the company. If anything ever goes wrong, you have something you can cash in."

But it can be difficult for developers to retain those rights. It's common for publishers to assume the majority of the financial risk and therefore retain the ownership of the intellectual property as their payoff for the gamble. This makes it harder for studios to become more financially independent, as they don't actually own the rights to make any sequels to a successful game.

"IP is everything," Geithman says. "Popular intellectual properties add huge value to your company. Publishers know this, and it's becoming more and more difficult to retain ownership of anything you create. It isn't in the publisher's best interest to pay a developer to create and own an original IP, and then lose control if the IP becomes popular."

It's not always that way, however. Recently, Pandemic struck a deal with Elevation Partners, a venture capitalist company that provides funding to Pandemic and partner developer BioWare. Goldman explains, "We've structured our deal with Elevation so that we can control our destiny and focus on doing what is best for the properties that we're developing. If the publisher and developer have competing goals, it can be really hard. Because we're independent, we can take as long as it takes to develop the best possible games."

Eggebrecht points to the Elevation partnership as an excellent new alternative method of securing funding for games. "There is a lot of outside capital interested in games and that is an option for control of your destiny," he says. "Having said that, even working within the traditional publishing model, there is a lot of freedom to be had—I certainly can't complain about our creative freedom working with Sony."

Kristiansson agrees that developers can still benefit from the current model. "I actually feel that it has been valuable to have external partners that we need to justify our creative decisions for," he says.

Even if a studio doesn't have the financial wherewithal to fund itself, it doesn't mean that it won't be an option at some point. "I think most developers are one big hit away from having the clout to be able to create and own their own IP," Geithman says. "Of course, they are also one flop away from going out of business—so it's a mixed bag."

And even the studios that seem to have it made aren't immune to money concerns. "Remaining independent comes with a price tag," Goldman says. "We need financial resources to do it alone. When games require a large budget, we're taking a large financial risk. In the end it's all worth it, but it can be difficult."

Part of the problem for studios is that games continue to grow exponentially more expensive to make. "With games, we still have to make everything up from scratch," Schafer explains. "Games are built by hand. So it's going to stay expensive as long as it's so labor-intensive."

Another hurdle to overcome is the constantly updating hardware. "As long as we have new consoles emerging every six or seven years we'll all continue to spend lots of time and money recreating our pipelines and technology," Price says.

Eggebrecht agrees. "I am hoping for longer hardware cycles so that we can leverage more technology over a longer period," he says. "Nintendo is doing exactly that by essentially repackaging the GameCube but adding key features in the right spots [for the Wii]. It's a gutsy move and one I admire a lot."

Even if things get financially tough, most developers agree that being able to operate on their own terms is what matters. "I'm not sure if there is a 'right' offer from a publisher—we're not interested in being part of one," Price says. Geithman challenges that statement: "I think anyone that isn't independently wealthy wouldn't be being honest if they said they didn't have a price that would make them seriously think about it."

> "REMAINING INDEPENDENT COMES WITH A PRICE TAG."

So what lies ahead? Geithman is pragmatic. "Life for some. Death for the others. In short, the usual cycle that has been going on for years," he predicts. "I do think that the next big shakeout will be more extreme just because the costs of developing games have risen so much and the sales numbers on most games just don't justify it."

Mizuguchi feels more optimistic. "We may see more independent game developers in the future—don't you think? Funding, investments, networking, and collaborations are some of the ways that can trigger things in that direction." Kristiansson agrees. "The last few years there has been a trend to do more in-house productions, but I think this trend will soon be reversed," he says. "Large companies are not ideal for creative production."

Of course, what all the studios hope for, in both the short term and the long run, is what everyone wants—that big hit, that commercial success. When asked what he sees for the future, Schafer jokes, "Lots of money and fast cars and good times. I see that future all the time," he laughs. "I find those positive visualization sessions motivating."

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

The developers we talked to had a lot more to say that we didn't have room for here—for the full interviews, go check out opm.1up.com.

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REVIEWS

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, ONE GAME AT A TIME

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XENOSAGA EPISODE III
THE BEST SO FAR

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OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH

90
LOCOROCO
ROCK 'N' ROLL—AT FIRST

PSP
OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH

RATING KEY
In our new scoring system, a game that receives an *OPM* score of 10 is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 5 is merely average. And a 0.5? Well…at least they're fun to rip apart.

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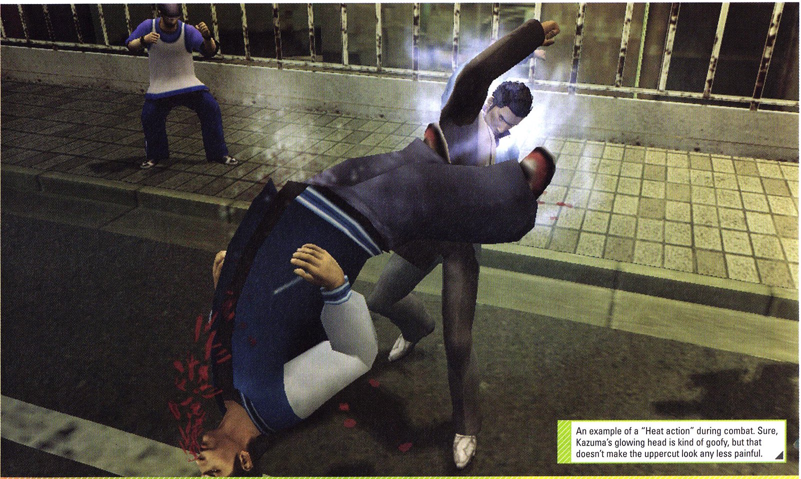
PLAY
LEGO STAR WARS II

ISSUE 109
OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE
SONY



An example of a "Heat action" during combat. Sure, Kazuma's glowing head is kind of goofy, but that doesn't make the uppercut look any less painful.

PUB. Sega DEV. Amusement Vision ESRB M MSRP $49.99

YAKUZA

TAKING A RIDE TO J-TOWN

Yakuza is, simply put, a role-playing game. It's an atypical RPG—instead of a blue-haired boy or a cool magic kid, you play a formidable, middle-aged yakuza enforcer—but it's an RPG nonetheless. A very glib way to describe *Yakuza* in terms of other games would be to say that it's *Shenmue* done right. *Yakuza* has *Shenmue's* attention to world-building and combat mechanics, but it eliminates *Shenmue's* reliance on a day/night cycle and inane dialogue (remember "Do you know where I can find some sailors?" or "I used to be Chinese!"?). A better past-game-as-yardstick is *River City Ransom*—that is, a game that mixes RPG and brawler mechanics, then drops said mixture into a well-defined and focused setting.

Yakuza feels like the logical next step for the plot-driven adventure games of old, and it actually tells a pretty good crime story. Spanning 13 chapters and filled with a multitude of characters and subplots, it opens with you playing Kazuma Kiryu—a rising star in his yakuza clan—performing a routine money pickup. As you get acclimated to the yakuza culture, things start to get crazy when your best friend kills your family lieutenant...and you take the fall (and the accompanying 10-year sentence).

After serving your sentence, you emerge from prison and return to a vastly changed underworld where much has happened within the harsh politics of the yakuza clan during your absence. Just as you're getting comfortable with the changes, the story reaches its first major beat by introducing the sudden loss of a large sum of money (10 billion yen, about $87 million)—timed with the appearance of an innocent 10-year-old girl. It's Kazuma's investigation of the state of yakuza politics, the search for the missing money, and his impromptu *Léon: The Professional*-esque adoption of the girl that the story focuses on. If anything, the main problem with this grand story is that the pacing is a bit uneven—it goes from moving briskly to slowing down for the sake of lengthening the game (which took me about 20 hours to get through).

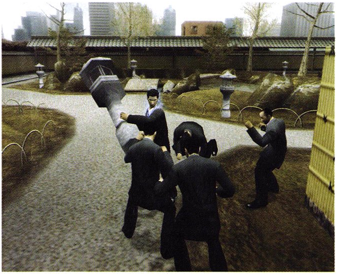
One thing the gaming press was worried about was the translation, as *Yakuza* is, as expected, steeped deeply in Japanese culture. Textwise, the translation seems fine, as long as you don't mind the F-bomb being dropped every three syllables or so; listening to *Yakuza's* many cut-scenes feels like listening to *Scarface* but with Japanese characters. The somewhat bizarre insults (which are all too profane for publication here) aren't the fault of the American translators trying too hard to be hip and edgy—it actually does sound like the quirky way that Japanese youth combine profanity, hip-hop slang, and odd syntax in their speech. Voicewise, the cast is actually very good (especially Darryl Kurylo, who plays Kazuma), with the expected exception of Michael Madsen, who basically plays himself.

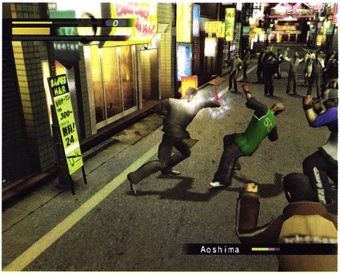
Like in any RPG, the story is wrapped up inside combat. *Yakuza* contains random battles, but the story's explanation for why they're happening actually makes sense—they're fools who're trying to mug you. As Kazuma wanders around town, shady characters (while they technically range from common street thugs to rival yakuza members to debt collectors, they're all basically the same people with slightly different clothes) all vie for your funds. The fights basically go like this: Combat starts, Kazuma completely takes his opponent down, and then there's a scene of the thug giving him back his money. Just the use of context turns what would normally be an annoying game mechanic into something enjoyable and satisfying.

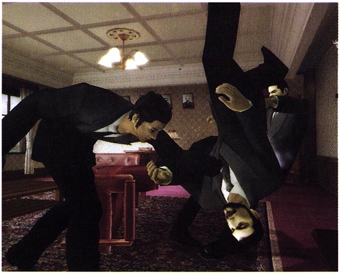
What also helps is that *Yakuza* has some of the most exhilarating and wince-inducing combat seen in a brawler yet. You have standard

SOFT SABRA

For those of you who thrill at the marvel of ogling seminude Japanese women, you can go to any convenience store and flip through a copy of *Sabra* on the magazine rack. *Sabra* is a real magazine, and is kind of like the Japanese *Maxim* or *FHM*. No full nudity here!







workhorse combos that deal basic damage and help build up your Heat gauge (or, as I like to term it, your "Badass Yakuza Who Throws Down" meter). When the gauge fills up, Kazuma glows blue and can then pull off moves (by pressing certain buttons when a particular kanji appears onscreen) like slamming opponents into walls, cracking skulls on guardrails, stomping on faces with his snakeskin boots, or choking people with aluminum baseball bats. To top it off, these visuals are often accompanied by painful-sounding crunches that indicate the fracturing (or outright snapping) of bones.

Just as you're getting a handle on your Heat gauge, you learn extra moves from a homeless martial-arts master (don't ask) that add a new layer of counters and dodges on top of the punch/kick/wield/Heat gauge combat system. Which means that the combat evolves from just using the Square and Triangle buttons to pull off a basic three-punch-two-kick combo to doing things like dodging to the side and shoving your knee into a thug's solar plexus, blocking a punch and instantly retorting with a stinging and humiliating slap to the face, pulling off a Giant Swing (the pro wrestling favorite), and even jumping on top of a baddie and pounding his face into the ground. This evolution transforms the combat from that of a simple brawler into something much more raw, visceral, and primal.

It's a shame that such raw combat is hampered by technical issues like a camera that has a hard time keeping track of both you and your opponents. Also, the quirky lock-on-but-not-quite mechanic allows you to focus on a dude in front of you, but he can shake you pretty easily. Most annoying are the times where you're locked in a five-hit combo but your opponent evades on the second hit—you're locked into the animation for the combo, which makes you vulnerable to a counterattack.

Besides the plot progression and brawling, *Yakuza* has its fair share of quirky side activities. You can choose to go after a purse-snatcher, interject on a gelato shopkeeper's behalf when he's being extorted, or go on a quest to find dog food. You can hit up the batting cages to use your bat in a way that doesn't involve face smashing. You can dig for toys at the arcade or go to a casino for games of baccarat, dice rolling, or simple slots. If you just love to fight, you can duke it out in an underground pit-fighting arena. There's a bizarre massage-parlor minigame. There's also a hostess bar, where you can go woo a hostess with drink, food, and good conversation (and get the resultant text messages, complete with wacky emoticons, afterward). You can even go to a bar and order real, licensed brands of alcohol (both Japanese and other countries' products), complete with logos.

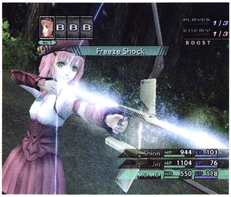
It's too bad that a game with so much has its share of problems that slowly build up, such as the noncontrollable camera (for some reason, the right analog stick is used for the minimap, not the camera), some annoying boss fights and stealth sequences, a linear story that lessens the game's replay value, and combat that gets repetitive due to much reuse of both enemy characters and animations. Ultimately, though, *Yakuza* is a damn good, er, yakuza RPG. | *Thierry Nguyen*

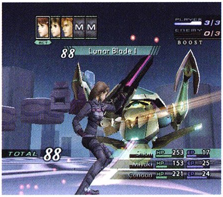
> ...OR AS I CALL IT, YOUR "BADASS YAKUZA WHO THROWS DOWN" METER.

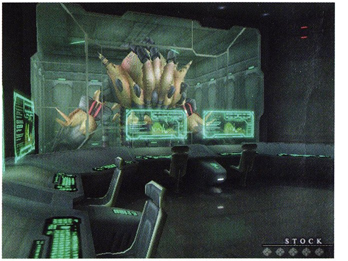
VERDICT A true yakuza RPG, complete with near-flawless combat, a ripping crime yarn, and hostess-bar minigames.

SCORE 8 | 10

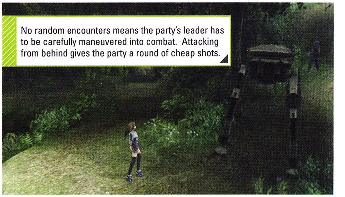
LOADED
One thing that can divide *Yakuza* players is the loading time when you move from area to area. Essentially, whenever the camera angle changes, there is a slight 1-3 second load time, which builds up over time. This load time is really annoying, but I eventually just got used to it.







PS2
OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH



No random encounters means the party's leader has to be carefully maneuvered into combat. Attacking from behind gives the party a round of cheap shots.

PUB. Namco Bandai **DEV.** Monolith Soft **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

XENOSAGA EPISODE III: ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA

OUR LITTLE XENOSAGA HAS FINALLY GROWN UP....

Xenosaga Episode I: Der Wille zur Macht was an exceptionally intelligent newcomer to the RPG crowd, but it droned on and used words no one else knew. It showed a lot of promise, but it was really hard to put up with. *Episode II: Jenseits von Gut und Bose* gave up on trying to show people how intelligent it was—in fact, it seemed like it just gave up altogether. Twenty hours or so of prettied-up playtime and characters who played like cookie cutters made it clear that if people didn't like *Xenosaga* being smart and ugly, it could be stupid and pretty with the best. After going through all those growing pains, the question remains, "Is the kid all right?" *Xenosaga Episode III: Also Sprach Zarathustra* is more than all right—it's near perfect.

The depth of ideas presented here matches and exceeds the ambitions of any of the other games of the series, let alone most other games. *Episode III* covers topics including the responsibility of the creator to the created, the shared nature of duty and honor, the necessity and difficulty of maintaining one's humanity in the face of war and its horrors, and man's place in the cosmos. But *Episode III* soars where *Episode I* coasted.

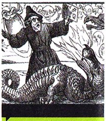
In *Episode III*, the ideas are there because the characters are acting on them, not because a villain is cackling about them. As we find out the truths of the series, characters act, react, learn and, god bless them, emote. If *Episode I* seemed a curmudgeon, *Episode III* has grown into a skilled philosopher; it teaches through action, not lecture.

Action is finally as a big a draw for the game as the story of the Gnosis, U-DO, and KOS-MOS is. With unique skill trees for each character, each of which is composed of two main branches to pursue that offer very different benefits, the characters are once again interesting to level up and play with. Level advancement proceeds perfectly against the game's difficulty level, making every combat situation easily won—but only if you fight without error. You can win virtually every boss fight on the first attempt, but you will feel like each is desperate and could all go wrong at any moment until you finally see the enemy's body hit the ground. The only real problem with the combat is that robot maps are so rare, because the spectacular power of piloting giant robots is as cathartic as anything.

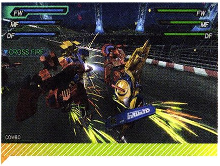
The *Xenosaga* series was originally slated to have six episodes, but the decision was made to have *Episode III* be the final installment. Presumably, the original schedule for the last three episodes had them each at *Episode's II*'s 20-25 hour mark, because squeezing all that story line into a single game means that *Episode III* clocks in at "huge." Huge hours long. Before you get into the awesomely *Lemmings*-like puzzle minigames or try to find all the secret doors and keys, plan on a minimum of 40 hours just to make it through the story. Unrepentantly intelligent, epic, and approachable, this is one of the best RPGs available today and the Rubedo of the *Xenosaga* series. | Patrick Joynt

THIS IS THE END An excellent conclusion for fans of the series, and the best way for newcomers to jump into the game.

SCORE 9|10



SAY WHAT?
Newcomers are welcome—*Episode III*'s in-game encyclopedia provides not just detailed information on what you've learned but succinct summations of the first two games as well. But there are still a lot of obscure references. Even with the in-game texts, I had to Google Yeshua, Lemegeton, and Merkabah. (Those are, respectively, a member of the party, a computer program, and a spaceship.)



IGPX: IMMORTAL GRAND PRIX

HAND-TO-HAND AT 350 MPH

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Sting

ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

The merging of Namco and Bandai has done nothing to ebb the flow of mundane anime-based fighting games coming to the PlayStation 2 (case in point: See the other reviews on this page). *IGPX* is a bit better than the usual Namco Bandai/Cartoon Network fare, though, if only because it's not simply two big-eyed freaks facing off in a static arena while firing the same two moves over and over again.

It seems the publisher doesn't want to stray too far from what it knows, however, since *IGPX* is still basically a simple fighting game. As your team of three mechs screams around the track at upward of 350 mph, the goal is to beat the metallic snot out of the *other* team of three mechs before racing to the finish line.

The combat is decent. The game is built around a simplistic combo system that utilizes most of the face buttons on the PS2 pad, along with the ability to give basic orders to your teammates—tell them to rally to you, play defense, go man-to-man, or concentrate on the enemy with the lowest amount of health. The action tends to degenerate into a button-mashing brawl more often than not, but it's still a pretty good time.

The racing aspect is tacked on, though. All but a little of the acceleration is done automatically, as is most of the steering. Think of it as a fighting game in a fast-moving arena. A few track obstacles on later courses mix things up a bit, but you still won't be worrying about the running order until the last few hundred feet of a race, where you'll use all of your accumulated boost to reach the finish line before whatever other mechs may still be in the race.

While *IGPX* isn't quite as shallow as previous anime offerings from Namco Bandai, only hardcore fans of the series will find themselves playing much past a few hours. Still, I give developer Sting credit for turning such a difficult license into something more than another *Twisted Metal* clone. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT An interesting take on the combat-racing genre that's mostly combat, not so much racing.

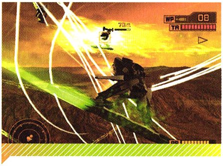
SCORE 6|10

DOMESTIC DRIVER

IGPX began life as five separate five-minute episodes aired on Cartoon Network in 2003. Execs liked the shorts so much that they worked with creators Production I.G (*Ghost in the Shell, Kill Bill*'s animated segments) to flesh it out into a full-length series. That makes it Cartoon Network's first completely original anime series.

SURFING IS BOSS!

Giant robots aren't the only ones who can float around on nothing, claiming some kind of "universal energy." Solar and hydrogen sails, Dyson spheres, and mere rings around a sun—science fiction has come up with plenty of ways to move with no clear source of power. But *Eureka Seven* lets its giant robots fly around on surfboards.



EUREKA SEVEN VOL. 1: THE NEW WAVE

ROBOTS GOOD, HUMANS BAD!

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. BEC

ESRB T MSRP $39.99

***Eureka Seven Vol. 1:** The New Wave* has some great potential—and some built-in problems. The source (the anime *Eureka Seven*) is a fantastically well thought-out universe full of monsters and giant robots, as humans and giant robots alike surf through the air on their ref boards. That's right—surf!

However, the anime's tightly paced story doesn't leave much time for its characters to have side adventures. The constricted time frame of the story certainly doesn't lend itself to a videogame (and its probable sequels), and quite frankly, the show's main characters would make terrible videogame characters. So, *The New Wave* is set a few years before the anime, with an almost entirely new cast of characters.

That's nice in theory, but the problems start when you realize that while your character and the story are technically important to the setting, they're poor shadows of the show. It's understandable that Eureka, Renton, and their story aren't the main parts of the game, but their replacements don't measure up in terms of charm or personality.

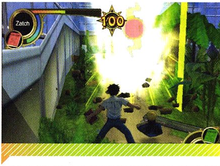
Even if *The New Wave*'s story were as good as the show's (it's not), it's delivered through a graphics engine that looks like it wasn't finished before the game shipped. Humans, walls, floors, and anything else other than the giant robots look like refuse from a junior college 3D-modeling class.

In addition to being ugly, playing as the humans isn't a satisfying representation of the genre being aped—RPGs for the on-foot portions, skateboarding for ref-board parts. However, the giant robot parts are so fast-paced and so easy to pick up and play—and look so good—that I found myself nearly forgetting the rest of the game's frustrations. You can even customize your robo midcombat, making every encounter as different as you want it to be.

Sadly, great robots aren't enough to salvage this game. | *Patrick Joynt*

EUREKA A nifty bit of backstory for *Eureka Seven* fans and really fun robot combat.
AGEHA SQUAD Anything not a robot looks bad and plays awfully.

SCORE 5|10



ZATCH BELL! MAMODO FURY

JAPANESE FOR "BORING"

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Mechanic Arms

ESRB T MSRP $39.99

Zatch Bell the anime series is all about teams of characters—one human and one magical being called a Mamodo—who battle each other for *Highlander*-style supremacy. And to be very honest, you've got to be a *huge* fan of the anime to even come close to enjoying playing *Mamodo Fury*.

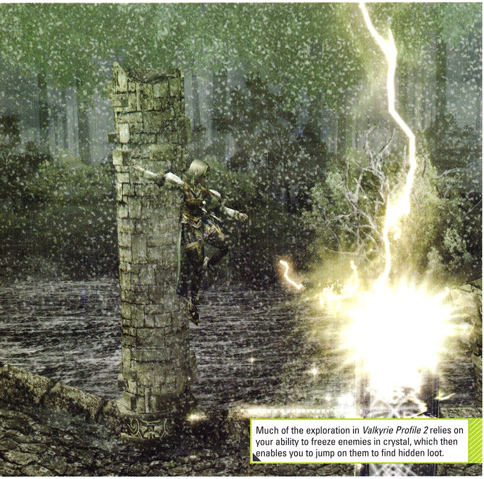
Like the show, the game is a series of 1-on-1 battles. These are broken up with some skippable story scenes that feature still frames of the anime's boring characters, accompanied by their bargain-basement voice actors. The rest of the game is just as technically poor: The characters and environments look like they were created around the time of the PS2's launch, not five years later.

The battles take place in smallish 3D arenas. There's a two-player mode in which many different teams are available. But in the single-player game, strategy is pretty much limited to having Zatch (a Mamodo), shoot bolts of lightning until his energy meter runs out, at which point you tag him out of action and make him run around to charge it back up. You learn more attacks as the game goes on, but there aren't nearly enough to keep things interesting after the first bout. What makes it all even worse is the camera—you'll struggle mightily with the thing, desperately trying to keep it at an angle where you can actually see your opponents.

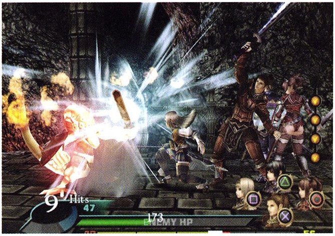
And when *Mamodo Fury does* attempt to inject a bit of variety into the battles, the game becomes so completely inscrutable that it effectively stops your gameplay until you consult a strategy guide. I spent well over two hours replaying the 11th battle and could not, for the life of me, figure out what the game wanted me to do. That's the worst kind of game design—the kind that only the people who made it can understand. | *Chris Kohler*

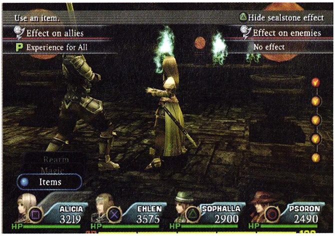
VERDICT A useless camera, awful presentation, and shallow, sometimes impenetrable gameplay combine to produce a furious pile of garbage.

SCORE 2|10



Much of the exploration in *Valkyrie Profile 2* relies on your ability to freeze enemies in crystal, which then enables you to jump on them to find hidden loot.





PUB. Square Enix DEV. tri-Ace ESRB T MSRP $49.99

VALKYRIE PROFILE 2: SILMERIA

OLD SCHOOL IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE

***Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria*'s** predecessor was just one of "those" games. You know, games that are released to little or no fanfare, save for a few praising reviews and chatter from the few customers who bought them. But somehow, as the years go by, the fame of these games grow—as do their prices on eBay, creating a somewhat artificially inflated sense of popularity. OK, maybe *Valkyrie Profile* doesn't totally fit into that categorization because it was actually a good game, but there doesn't seem to be any question that *Valkyrie Profile 2*'s existence has much to do with the aforementioned process.

With that in mind, it seems like tri-Ace went out of its way not to seriously mess with the *Valkyrie Profile* formula so that people who didn't play the first game—either because they just never heard of it or couldn't afford its ridiculous price on eBay (around $150)—would get a chance to know what all the fuss was about. So, essentially what you're getting here is a remake of the original game but with an assortment of expected updates to take advantage of the PS2's extra horsepower.

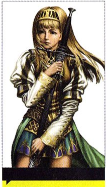
What that means is this: You explore towns the same way, in that you're walking on a 2D plane and prompted to move in different directions when walking past certain doors or passageways. The same applies to the *Silmeria*'s many dungeons, except that with the dungeons, there's the added element of crystal platforming—another feature brought from the original game—that lets you freeze enemies in a block of crystal, enabling you to jump on top of them to reach previously inaccessible areas. It feels very old school and familiar to fans of the original game, but it also feels very restrictive and mundane. What makes it even worse is that much of the game looks amazing, aside from the dreary dungeons—and you want to explore it, but you can't!

Plus, you have to deal with the fact that while map movement takes place on a 2D plane, battles take place in full 3D—the transition is a little more than jarring at first, but you'll grow accustomed to it rather quickly. In fact, the battle system is one of *Silmeria*'s finer points. So much of how well you do in battle is dependant on which characters you have in your party and how you combine their attacks to make combinations. If you do everything right, you can pretty much obliterate everything within a few minutes, but if you're missing attacks, not positioning yourself out of harm's way, or simply trying to strong-arm enemies, then *Silmeria* proves to be a very, very difficult game. It's also worth pointing out that the camera and an important dash move—the single most important move you can use to get out of an enemy's range of attack—are both a little spotty in terms of control, making battles even more difficult as a result.

Still, it's fun to come up with different strategies for battle, and if you find that one combination of characters and moves don't work, you can always try another. It's just too bad that such an intricate—albeit slightly flawed—game is covered in a beautiful wrapper that you can't explore beyond a 2D plane. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

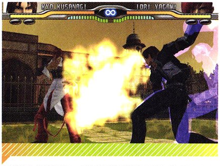
PROS Beautiful game, combat system is deep and requires excellent use of strategy, story does its job
CONS Camera and dash move cause problems in battle, game may prove to be a little too hard for casual RPG fans

SCORE 7|10



CRAZY GALS

Much like the raving derelicts we get to deal with every day on the streets of San Francisco, *Silmeria*'s lead character, Alicia, frequently talks to herself. Of course, part of that has to do with the fact that she's "possessed," making it hard to get behind her as a main character.



THE KING OF FIGHTERS 2006

3D DONE RIGHT

| PUB. SNK Playmore DEV. SNK Playmore
ESRB T MSRP $29.99

Although its title is somewhat misleading, *The King of Fighters 2006* is the sequel to *KOF: Maximum Impact*, the first *KOF* redone in 3D graphics. Despite its fancy visuals, I refused to embrace *MI* with open arms: Wrought with BS combos and BS tactics, gaudy stage designs and stifled gameplay, *Maximum Impact* felt like a rushed job, unfit for even the most ardent fan.

KOF 2006 marks a major improvement. The character roster, doubled in size from its predecessor, carries an impressive weight of 38 fighters. Not only did the roster size increase, but also the number of backgrounds jumped from 11 to 16. The stages are prettier, too, appearing as though SNK learned from its mistakes and took some time crafting visually impressive milieux.

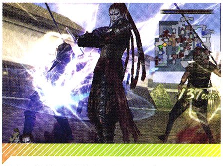
Visuals aren't everything, though. If *KOF 2006* suffered from the mistakes of the past, then the face-lift wouldn't mean much—it would just be pretty garbage. Fortunately for fans, *KOF 2006* disposed of all the crappiness of *MI* by restructuring the game system. In *Maximum Impact*, you're pretty much screwed if you're knocked off your feet, as the opponent can combo the crap out of you when you're on the ground. *KOF 2006*, on the other hand, implements more precautions to stop excessive ground combos: Getting up from the ground is quicker and easier, and if a ground combo gets out of hand, the combo counter will stop, thus allowing the person on floor to get up freely.

Despite the limitations, *KOF 2006* remains a very combo-friendly game. Each character has many attack strings, each of which requires a specific combination of buttons and directional inputs. Adding more fuel to the combo engine is the inclusion of "super cancels," in which you can cancel an enemy's "super move" and supplant it with your own. And, once you amalgamate the two, combos are deadly, damaging, and, above all, impressive.

Cheers to you, SNK Playmore, for cleaning out the garbage and giving 3D *KOF* a fresh start! | *Richard Li*

VERDICT Same great *KOF* fighting formula, repackaged with fancy 3D visuals, fast gameplay, and an extensive combo system.

SCORE 8|10



SAMURAI WARRIORS 2

HOW CAN KOEI FAIL TO MEET ITS OWN STANDARDS?

| PUB. Koei DEV. Omega Force
ESRB T MSRP $39.99

Samurai Warriors 2 wouldn't have looked so bad if it had come out before *Dynasty Warriors 4*. Before *DW4*, Koei created an atmosphere of such low expectations for the sequels in its *Warriors* series that the meager set of changes and additions from *Samurai Warriors* to *Samurai Warriors 2* would meet par. But then *DW4* included a great strategic level of combat, letting you chart the course of provinces and really feel like a mighty warlord. This means that *Samurai Warriors 2*—which also includes a brutally unpleasant *Monopoly*-esque version of the ancient Japanese board game sugoroku—just doesn't cut the mustard anymore.

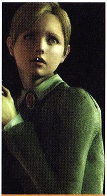
Some changes do fix issues from the first game nicely. Characters can now advance to level 50, and the skill system's complete reworking lets you take advantage of all those levels. You gain some skills as you level up, but most you have to purchase or gain randomly from defeated enemy officers. The new characters are all fun to see as *Warriors* personas, particularly evil ninja Kotaro Fuma. Castle stages are still hard to play in, but they're now part of full battlefields instead of their own levels.

Unfortunately, those changes fail to address the key issues of a camera that's way too close to see what's going on or enemies appearing out of nowhere because of short draw distances. Expect to fail missions until you map out the one acceptable route to reach every objective in time, just like in the original game. And though there's a "special stance" set of attacks, it doesn't change the core tactic of tapping normal attack until your thumb breaks.

Samurai Warriors 2 doesn't introduce any new problems to the series and corrects a few of the glaring inadequacies of the first game. Nevertheless, it fails to add enough to the series to justify being a full-priced sequel. Maybe *3* will have something that compares to *DW4*'s strategy mode, but this is strictly a cash-in. | *Patrick Joynt*

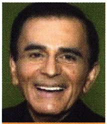
THE WARRING STATES The same stuff we've seen before, including most of the flaws.
UNIFICATION If you like the stuff, it's nice to have more.

SCORE 5|10



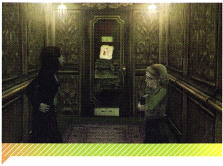
BULLY FOR THEM

One reason *Rule of Rose* fails so thoroughly is that the heroine is willing to let a tribe of other younger, smaller kids push her around. It would make sense in a *Lord of the Flies* sort of way, except for one thing—Jennifer is the one with the ax. Wouldn't the other kids think maybe, y'know, they shouldn't kidnap the dog of the tall chick that just hacked a dozen imps to bits? Suspension of disbelief is one thing—willful stupidity is another altogether.



CRAZY GUYS

Are the English voice actors for *Samurai Warriors 2* insane, or is it a deliberate ploy to keep you off balance? Could it be actual historical accuracy? Did that many Japanese warlords actually sound like Casey Kasem?



RULE OF ROSE

SISTERHOOD OF THE MURDERING PANTS

| PUB. Atlus Software DEV. Punchline
ESRB M MSRP $49.99

At first blush, *Rule of Rose* would seem to have a lot going for it. Set in a Dickensian 1930s English orphanage, the game tells the sad tale of Jennifer, the newest and most deeply tragic addition to this house of (unrealized) horrors and a proud graduate of the Videogaming Institute of Endlessly Whimpering and Gasping Heroines. Jennifer immediately runs afoul of the Aristocrat Club, the ruling clique of the orphanage, and is whisked away to a strange, fishlike airship where she must endure the tortuous whims of the other children. Why? I can't exactly say. Coherence is not among *Rule of Rose*'s strong suits.

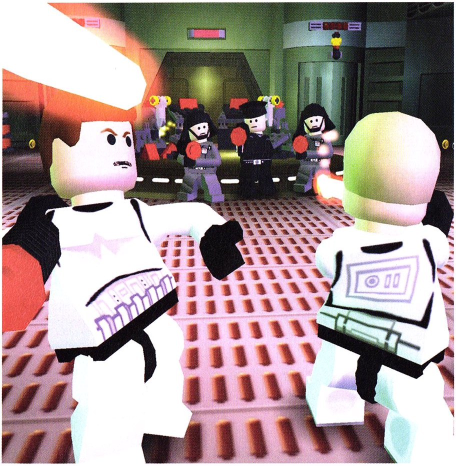
Unfortunately, neither is horror. While "creepy killer kids" sounds adequately bone-chilling, the sad reality is that most of their handiwork is left to imps with pig heads or Edvard Munch *Scream* faces—they just look silly, not nightmarish. Environments are similarly unscary—you feel like you're in a big empty airship or a big empty orphanage, but not a big empty *spooky* one. The final boss is pretty underwhelming as well.

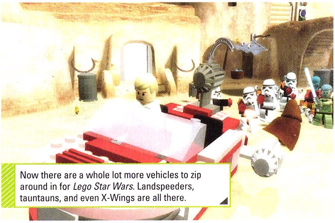
Lacking any eeriness, the errands you have to perform (restoring power, collecting items, etc.) feel as thuddingly unoriginal, rote, and tiresome as they actually are. Your faithful dog assists you throughout most of the game, using his keen sense of smell to track down clues. This is mostly a good thing, since it keeps you moving briskly through the barely 10 hours of gameplay and spares you from having to explore the dull environments. On the other hand, it leaves precious little to actually solve in this game, further underscoring the tedium.

The controls and presentation of combat sequences provide the true horror here, resulting in too many untimely demises followed by long trudges from the last remote save point to engage in another frustrating battle. The game only starts positioning save points wisely near the end of the game, but you'll probably lose interest before then. | *Robert Coffey*

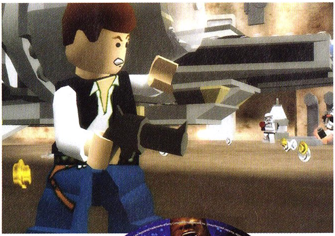
VERDICT For a truly creepy child experience, babysit the neighbor's kids for an afternoon—you won't find it here.

SCORE 4|10





Now there are a whole lot more vehicles to zip around in for *Lego Star Wars*. Landspeeders, tauntauns, and even X-Wings are all there.



PUB. LucasArts DEV. Traveller's Tales ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

PLAY IT

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine
ISSUE 109
SONY
NTSC U/C

LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

LEGO PREQUEL HAS TAUGHT YOU WELL!

While the media saw *Lego Star Wars* and politely nodded at its cuteness early on, not many people realized how much fun the game would be in its four-hour playthrough, nor how much better it told the prequels' story than the actual trilogy of films did. With *Lego Star Wars II,* not only does the game itself provide a general improvement over the previous release, but it also reinforces just how much better the original (which, technically, is the sequel) *Star Wars* trilogy is.

LSW2 is a superior title over *LSW* in nearly every way. *LSW* too short? Now in *LSW2*, there are not only more levels, but each one takes longer to get through, so the core game takes about 10 hours or so—and then you can add the time it takes to obtain all the unlockables. Didn't like how the vehicle levels were locked on rails? Now when you take part in famous vehicular moments such as the Death Star attack, the Battle of Endor, or the ever-popular Hoth level, you can actually fly your ship around freely. Thought there could be a bit more laughs and zaniness? Now there are amusing little side jokes and random areas that have nothing to do with *Star Wars*; even the cut-scenes have an extra bit of silliness injected into them.

The news isn't all good, however. *LSW2* provides an interesting example of something that is simultaneously better and worse than its predecessor: cooperative puzzles. Stretching beyond the "two characters pull a switch at the same time" mechanic of the first game, two players now work together to push blocks and create platforms for each other or travel along parallel paths, destroying obstacles for each other. Many boss fights involve one character fighting the boss and the other messing around with the environment to help.

The focus on cooperation is encouraging, until you realize that it makes the single-player really annoying if you happen to be some sort of friendless misanthrope. Frequently, you'll find yourself knowing exactly what to do, but your AI buddies won't. Sure, they eventually understand, but it can be tiresome to switch back and forth between characters just to get them to line up and hit a bunch of buttons.

Additionally, enemies only focus on whatever character you're controlling. Since I've already mentioned that your buddy Legos don't really do much (other than need a helping hand to solve puzzles, they also can't even damage enemies, unless you're specifically controlling them), you can imagine the annoying situations where you have a hard time completing puzzles because you're trying to build a Lego bike or use the Force to make a bridge, but you get interrupted by all the baddies shooting you while your fellow Legos just kind of twiddle their nonexistent thumbs.

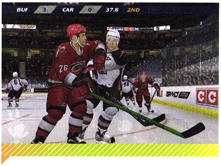
About 80 percent of the time, *LSW2* is an absolute joy—a sort of digital sunshine in a bottle. But the very same cooperation mechanic that is generally lauded and improved is the one that drags the game to a grinding halt at times. Then again, this is another case of the game echoing the original movies—it's kind of similar to how some people think that *Return of the Jedi* is pretty damn good overall...except for those silly Ewoks. | *Thierry Nguyen*

HAN SHOOTS FIRST Pretty much everything is better in *LSW2* than in *LSW*...
GREEDO SHOOTS FIRST ...except for the co-op-heavy nature of the game, which makes the single-player grating at times.

SCORE 8 | 10

LEGO CRAZY

Lego Star Wars teaches us that comedic mischief involving bathing stormtroopers is much funnier when done in Lego form. We know that Lego has done *Harry Potter, Spider-Man*, and *Batman*—and we wish there were Lego games for those, too.



NHL 07

REALITY CROSS-CHECK

PUB. EA Sports **DEV.** EA Canada
ESRB E10+ **MSRP** $29.99

Forget all the hype you've been hearing about *NHL 07* and its revolutionary right-analog-stick puck control; that fancy-schmancy stuff is strictly on the Xbox 360 this year. The PS2 version does things a tiny bit differently.

In *NHL 07*, all passing of little rubber discs is done using the right analog stick on the DualShock 2. Wanna pass to the winger streaking up the ice to your right? Flick the stick to the right. Want to dump the puck into the offensive zone and send another forward chasing after it? Waggle the stick forward. It takes a bit of getting used to at first, but the game really opens up once you master it. No more screwing up your momentum to make a cross-ice pass, no more arcane button combos to drop the puck back. It's fantastic.

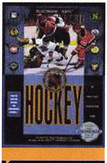
The puck physics in this year's *NHL* game are much improved as well. I've yet to see the puck actually pass through the goalie or another player, or snap into some canned animation. It actually seems to bounce around pretty realistically, making for some spectacular saves and even better rebounds.

NHL 07 still suffers from some of the standard issues, though. Players still tend to skate away from the puck in order to play their assigned positions unless you take control and steer them in the right direction. And a massive jumble of bodies is common when the play becomes heated in front of the net. The collision detection on the players still looks right to me, but the mass chaos looks pretty stupid.

EA has finally made some headway with the latest *NHL*. The series has been well on its way to reclaiming its past glory for a few years now, and *07* continues the trend. This feels way more like real hockey than the arcadey, gimmicky junk we've had to swallow in the past. Just a few more tweaks here and there, and EA's *NHL* will be the coolest game on ice once again. | *Greg Sewart*

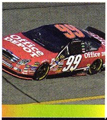
VERDICT EA continues to improve the *NHL* franchise by adding features that are actually practical and innovative. The best PS2 version of the series thus far.

SCORE 8.5 | 10



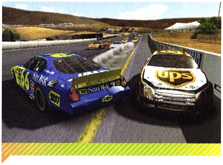
GRIZZLED VETERAN

It's hard to believe that EA's *NHL* series is 15 years old this year. The first *NHL Hockey* hit the Genesis back in 1991. It lacked real players, but it had all the NHL teams and was, hands down, the greatest hockey game ever made at that point.



FLIPPIN' MAD

NASCAR fans will notice one major omission in *07*'s roster—Carl Edwards' No. 99 Ford Fusion. The flamboyant young driver, who performs a backflip whenever he wins a race, is nowhere to be seen in *NASCAR 07*, thanks to contract issues that he and EA just couldn't get resolved in time for the ship date. EA is hoping to have him back on the driver-select screen for *NASCAR 08*.



NASCAR 07

DRIVE IT LIKE YOU STOLE IT

PUB. EA Sports **DEV.** EA Tiburon
ESRB E **MSRP** $39.99

I'm a big fan of this series, but looking back a year, I think I may have been a bit too easy on *NASCAR 06*. While the game itself was pretty sweet, there was a nasty handling issue in the upper series where the cars were almost impossible to control on old tires. It might have been more realistic, but was it ever hard to play.

NASCAR 07 fixes that problem, however. If you decide to run 100 laps at Bristol on the same set of tires in your Cup car, you'll still be slippin' and slidin' through the turns, but on the whole, it's way more forgiving. That's the bit that makes me so happy about this year's game.

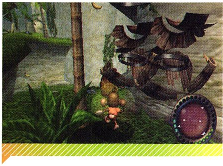
Otherwise, this is mostly a roster update, along with a few new features thrown in for good measure. The new adrenaline meter takes last year's hero/villain points a bit further by having their accumulation during the race actually affect your driver's stats. The whole thing feels really transparent during the actual race, though, so it's not really worth getting excited about.

I can live with a simple roster update, though, since last year's game was pretty fantastic from a racing fan's perspective. What I have trouble with, though, is the framerate. I like to drive with my rearview mirror on, but the game defaults to "off" for this feature. Why, you may ask? It's a sneaky way of trying to hide that turning on the rearview drops the framerate something awful on certain tracks. It's very distracting at best, and it can actually affect your performance at worst. So if you can live with relying on your spotter (that's the dude on the radio who tells you when someone's trying to pass you) more than your mirrors, you're good to go. If not, well—hit up a previous year.

NASCAR 07 is a good last hurrah on the PS2. I can live with this while I wait one more year for the real, next-gen *NASCAR* on the PlayStation 3. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Slightly more than a roster update, but not by much. Can't wait to play the inevitable PS3 version.

SCORE 7 | 10



SUPER MONKEY BALL ADVENTURE

WHO LET THOSE MONKEYS IN HERE?

PUB. Sega of America **DEV.** Traveller's Tales
ESRB E **MSRP** $39.99

Admittedly, the premise behind the entire *Monkey Ball* series—sliding spherical simians—should guarantee it a perfect score. But alas, a monkey rolling around inside a ball does not make for a perfect game, especially not when said game is of the adventure variety. See, this particular iteration of *Monkey Ball* focuses more on a main quest that involves running a series of errands for local town monkeys.

And, in all honesty, these errands get old really quickly. Not so much because they're tedious, but because the mechanics involved in rolling around a monkey in a ball really aren't meant for a game like this. Imagine playing an adventure game where it felt like the lead character was skating on ice all the time, and you pretty much have *Super Monkey Ball Adventure*. On top of that, the camera is absolutely terrible, which will only make you yearn for a level that takes place in space so that you can free the monkey and watch it drift into the sweet, black abyss. Factor in a few cliffs that need some pretty tight maneuvering, and you have a recipe for disaster. One nice aspect, however, is that there are some interesting twists on the typical formula that come in the form of different types of balls, each with a corresponding power, such as a wooden ball that floats in water.

The good news is that some of the traditional *Monkey Ball* levels are still in the game, and most fans will probably flock to those immediately in lieu of being some kind of whipping boy, er, monkey for the townspeople. Er, townsmonkeys. Unfortunately, you have to keep playing through the adventure portion of the game if you wish to unlock more of the features for the game, and it really isn't all that worth it unless you're the most ardent fan of monkeys inside balls. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS A few interesting twists on the *Monkey Ball* formula
CONS Most of the twists are bad ones, and the camera needs some major fixing

SCORE 5 | 10

OPM'S

KIDS ROUNDUP

Illustration: Karen Chu

MONSTER HOUSE

RESIDENT EVIL 4 KIDZ

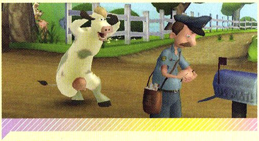
PUB. THQ DEV. Artificial Mind and Movement

ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

If you're gonna steal, steal from the best. *Monster House* has a big, sticky crush on *Resident Evil 4*. From the camera viewpoint (over the right shoulders of the preteen protagonists) to the dramatic boss battles and their quick-time events, you'll have a serious case of déjà zombie as you plod through the titular house's linear series of haunted hallways.

The shooting (with water pistols, natch) can get a bit clunky at times, but it's cool how the puzzle-solving is simplified so that even the young ones can figure out how to navigate the house's tricky traps. Monstrous creations that are just scary enough for third-graders make this a good substitute for grotesque grown-up survival horror. | *Chris Kohler*

SCORE 7 | 10



BARNYARD

THE SIMS, BOVINE-STYLE

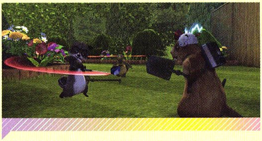
PUB. THQ DEV. Blue Tongue

ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

I'm not sure how *Barnyard* got slapped with the 10-and-over rating, because it's geared toward the second-grade gamer set. Rather than craft a generic beat-em-up that follows the plot of the film, THQ has created sort of a kiddie version of *The Sims*.

Create your own personalized cow, then hang out in the barnyard with the characters from the film. As you wander through the meadows, animals will give you missions, usually in the form of simple fetch quests and minigames. As you accumulate cash for accomplishing all this, you can buy new furniture to trick out the barn. There's a day-night cycle, but impatient kids can skip the clock ahead. One warning: There's a lot of reading required. | *Chris Kohler*

SCORE 5 | 10



OVER THE HEDGE

IS WHERE YOU SHOULD THROW THIS

PUB. Activision DEV. Edge of Reality

ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

Games based on kids' movies are getting somewhat better, but *Over the Hedge* reverts to the same old beat-up-a-bunch-of-bad-guys formula. In this case, you run through a parade of identical-looking backyards and suburban streets as you lay into a horde of giant rats by slamming on the Square button.

It's clear that some work went into this; for example, the camera is entirely computer-controlled and it works great. But it's all just boring: When the back of the box advertises "destructible environments" and you can't smash the picnic table (much less the house), that's approaching false advertising. And don't get us started on the crappy "soundalike" voice actors who never stop yammering. | *Chris Kohler*

SCORE 5 | 10

ONE PIECE: PIRATES' CARNIVAL

TOTAL PARTY KILLER

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Hand

ESRB E MSRP $39.99

There's one thing that would make *One Piece: Pirates' Carnival* both more authentic and more fun, but unfortunately you have to be 21 to drink it, which leaves out the target audience. Even if you have a Multitap and can thus play this with four real human beings, it's a poor party game.

The idea is simple: Flip over cards on a big game board in the attempt to steal your friends' cards by surrounding them à la *Othello*. More often than not, a card will trigger a four-player minigame in which everyone battles for control of that space. But the minigames are so confusing, frustrating, and clunky that you might just as well put everyone's name in a hat and pick a winner. | *Chris Kohler*

SCORE 3 | 10

1UP RADIO

1UP™
NETWORK

Want to hear what our editors are excited about before your next issue arrives?

Tune in to 1UP Radio where the editors of 1UP, Electronic Gaming Monthly, Computer Gaming World, and the Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine sound off on various topics each week. Each episode is filled with juicy tidbits and behind-the-scenes info that we couldn't fit in the pages of this magazine.

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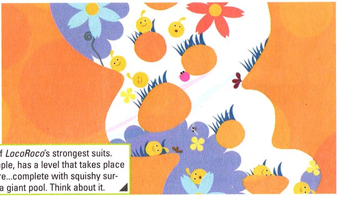
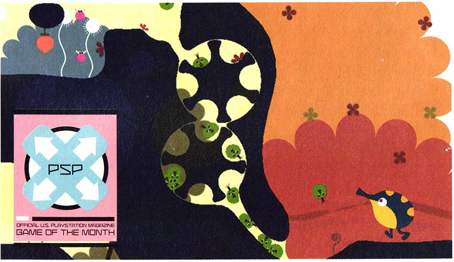


Level design is one of *LocoRoco*'s strongest suits. Each world, for example, has a level that takes place *inside* a giant creature...complete with squishy surfaces, and ending in a giant pool. Think about it.



PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** Sony CEI **ESRB** E **MSRP** $39.99

LOCOROCO

NOT LOCO, JUST BIPOLAR

I've never had a gaming experience turn so dramatically sour, shifting from a joyful experience of childlike play to a drudging, slogging, *hell-hole of miserable frustration*.

Perhaps that's a bit strong. But my initial time with *LocoRoco* was such a giddy experience that when it took such a sharp turn for the worse, it felt like being punched in the gut. Here's the problem: At the start, this game is just freakin' *wonderful*. It's this delicious mashup of music and ultrastylized art, with simplistic, addictive gameplay and some really clever, unusual level design. Designed as part pinball machine, part platformer, the levels are almost always both entertaining and surprising, and guiding your little LocoRoco through them is just pure fun.

And then...it's not. See, at the end of every level, you get a tally of how many of the various collectibles you've picked up. And you start to see that your tally is generally a very, very small percentage of the available items. So you start looking around for things you've missed.

Half an hour later, you're ready to rip the UMD out of your PSP, grind it into jagged bits, stir them into a milkshake, and serve it to whoever the hell thought one second was a long enough time to recover the little LocoRoco that go flying whenever you get hit with something spiky.

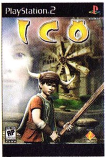
Yes, you see, *LocoRoco* has a sinister dual nature: On the surface, it's one of the most accessible and delightful games on the PSP...but lurking beneath is a fiendish, brutal collect-a-thon that will infuriate even the most hardcore platform fan. The problem is that you're controlling your LocoRoco with the forces of gravity, momentum, elasticity, and luck. None of these are quantifiable enough to allow for any kind of precision when attempting difficult jumps.

That wouldn't be such a problem if the basic game were not so simple. If you're just coasting along, looking for the exit, it's entirely possible it'll take you just a couple of minutes to beat each of the 40 levels. But hunting for extras can take a good 10 or 20 infuriating minutes per level. The only real middle ground is half-heartedly looking around for hidden areas, but that doesn't get you much. (Speaking of which, your rewards for your hours of arduous collecting are fairly slim: three minigames and a bunch of parts for your Loco House, a momentarily diverting nongame that felt like it should offer so much more.)

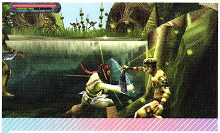
Artistically, *LocoRoco* has few peers. It looks beautifully weird, and almost all of the (mostly) excellent songs—complete with vocal parts that change depending on which of the LocoRoco friends you're playing as—wedged themselves deep into my consciousness for days on end. And I still find the basic gameplay extremely entertaining...as long as I'm just coasting through a level. But it would be irresponsible of me not to prepare you for the frustration that likely awaits you should you choose to look beneath the surface of this superficially delightful game. Consider yourself warned. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT Like your hot, psycho ex-girlfriend, the game is just so incredibly sweet...*at first.*

SCORE 8 | 10



GAMEOGRAPHY According to Mobygames.com, Tsutomu Kouno, game designer for *LocoRoco*, was a planner and background artist for *Ico*.



PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: DEAD MAN'S CHEST

SAVE YOUR BOOTY

PUB. Buena Vista Games DEV. Amaze Entertainment
ESRB T MSRP $39.99

The funny thing about this game version of *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* is that it's on the verge of being a good action game. At the very least, it attempts to create more than just the typical button-mashing action game where you could get by with just repeatedly pressing one of the face buttons without even looking at the screen. No, here you actually have to pay attention since enemies are equipped with different weapons that require different attacks to defeat.

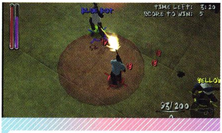
Unfortunately, this all kind of falls apart because of bad controls and some weird animation that occasionally makes it difficult to tell if you're hitting an enemy. Oh, and a special note to the developers: When someone walks into a river of molten lava, very rarely will they say "ouch" and then automatically walk back into said river and repeat. It's very annoying, and it often makes Jack Sparrow look like a total buffoon.

As for the puzzle parts of the game—well, come on, they're pirate puzzles, so that fact alone makes them good. Most of the problems with them stem from a drab color palette that makes it a little difficult to determine where you're supposed to go and what you're supposed to do—particularly if it's an environmental puzzle that requires vine swinging or some other act of derring-do. The camera often becomes troublesome as well since it's not particularly easy to see all of the elements that are supposedly encompassed in the puzzle you're solving. Nevertheless you have some decent "get the special item from point A to point B using other puzzle mechanics" action.

It also looks great for a PSP game and, since it borrows music from the movie, it sounds pretty nice as well—though a lot of that seems to drop off in the middle of the game and you're left instead with some ambient grunts and chirps. Ultimately, it's a good, pirate-heavy distraction but, thanks to the game's repetitiveness, it won't do much to keep your attention past the first few levels. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Not a total disaster but it's a little too monotonous
CONS Camera is pretty bad and the Johnny Depp stand-in needs to go.

SCORE 5|10



50 CENT: BULLETPROOF G-UNIT EDITION

PLUG NICKEL

PUB. Vivendi Universal DEV. High Voltage Software
ESRB M MSRP $39.99

Dear Mr. Cent,

After playing through your recent PSP game, I have come to an inescapable conclusion: You are a big fat crybaby. You were shot nine times? Boo-hoo, good sir, boo-hoo. There are half-naked enemies in your game that can withstand repeated shotgun blasts to the head without wincing, let alone dying. Nine little bullets almost killed you? In the world of your game, that makes you Lord King Wussy of the Universe. In pink hot pants.

But you know that already; that's why you use your potty mouth and the N-word so much. You poor dear, it breaks my heart to see you struggle like this. You try—you really, really try—to seem all hard and street-tough, but your heart's not in it. There's no other way to explain how dull and rote the gunslinging is in *Bulletproof*. Oh sure, the little execution and disarm animations are pretty violent, but if your heart were truly in it, I bet you would have made sure the controls were responsive enough to let players pull them off more easily.

I bet what you really want to do is make movies, right? That's why the cut-scenes run almost longer than the five hours of gameplay. It's a nice try and full of flair, but all those over-the-top and clichéd characters tell me you're just itching to do something deeper, like *Connie Dixon: Not Without My Malignant Daughter* for Lifetime.

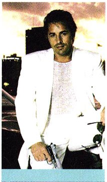
Frankly, Mr. Cent, I think you're going to need another near-death experience to reestablish your street cred, because this game makes you seem more like a junior college marketing major than a thug. How else can you explain the countless unlockable songs, videos, and officially licensed G-Unit clothing? It's a pretty relentless lesson in branding. You might need to pull a Rasputin and get poisoned, shot, and drowned before anyone sees you as scary again.

I wish you luck reclaiming your former toughness. In the future, I suggest you stick to advising all shorties to "Go" and leave the videogaming to professionals.

Sincerely, | *Robert Coffey*

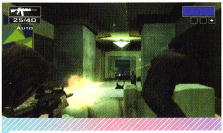
VERDICT If you think of *Bulletproof* as a Greatest Hits UMD and not a game, it's tolerable.

SCORE 4|10



HEARTBREAKER
Once upon a time in an alternate universe, Don Johnson dated Barbra Streisand and decided to record an album. A music video was made and actually put into heavy rotation on this nightmare world's version of MTV. Perhaps sensing the listening public's likely reaction, the chorus featured the line "Tell me what you feel now without the heartbeat." There are no accurate records of how many people were killed when Don Johnson stopped their hearts.

NAME THIS
Should Mr. Cent decide to pursue a career in weepy television movies for weepy women, he should visit the Lifetime movie title generator at www.bredcrumbs.com/lifetime-movie-title-generator for inspiration. It won't top *Mother, May I Sleep with Danger?*, but it'll come close.



MIAMI VICE THE GAME

DUMB COP, BAD COP

PUB. Sierra DEV. Rebellion
ESRB M MSRP $39.99

Miami Vice the TV show was responsible for so many things: half-assed stubbly beards, pastel T-shirts, wearing shoes without socks, and slow-motion nighttime shots of neon-bathed convertibles accompanied by the cutting-edge sounds of the nebulously musical and definitively gnomish Phil Collins. It did all that and still found the time to foster the insane notion that Glenn Frey somehow belonged on network television. *Miami Vice the Game*, to its credit, isn't so creatively bankrupt that it tries to cash in on that long-gone show; instead, it is so creatively bankrupt that it tries to cash in on the movie that is so creatively bankrupt that it tries to cash in on that long-gone show. The result is even less than you'd expect.

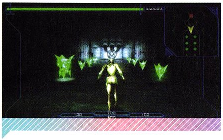
While you can choose to play this third-person shooter as either Crockett or Tubbs, your choice of cop makes no difference in terms of gameplay—it really boils down to determining just whose head you want obscuring your view while AI enemies unload their shotguns in your skull. Do you want Crockett's greasy semimullet making lining up your single-pixel crosshair impossible while you yell at the game for not allowing you to move and shoot simultaneously? Or would you prefer Tubbs' tidier 'do blotting out the screen while you curse the "take cover" game mechanic that lethally sticks your character behind the wrong wall for the umpteenth time?

The game box promises a *GTA*-like experience, with you earning "rep" to go undercover and deal with drug kingpins. But you don't. Instead, you endure a handful of duck-and-cover shooting-gallery missions, gathering drugs to sell for clothing and gun upgrades, then occasionally suffering through diplomatic minigames when you sell drugs to said kingpins. There's also an incredibly unpleasant computer-hacking minigame that does a great job re-creating a poor man's *Tron* and tons of frustration.

You can play *Miami Vice* co-operatively with a friend—but not if you value said friendship. Other than that, *Miami Vice* is the most unremarkable eight hours you'll spend en route to a lousy conclusion this year! | *Robert Coffey*

VERDICT As much fun as listening to "Smuggler's Blues" for eight hours straight.

SCORE 3|10



RENGOKU II: THE STAIRWAY TO H.E.A.V.E.N.

DUMB COP, BAD COP

PUB. Konami DEV. Hudson Soft
ESRB T MSRP $39.99

You have to wonder why Konami would bother green-lighting this sequel. The original *Rengoku*, also on the PSP, took its title quite literally: *The Tower of Purgatory*. The supercool customization aspect—where you could attach just about any weapon to any of your avatar's appendages—was overshadowed by the tired "run to a locked room, fight an enemy, run to the next locked room" play mechanics.

So now we have *Stairway to H.E.A.V.E.N.*, a sequel that accomplishes the exact same thing all over again. Your ADAM (Autonomous Dueling Armed Machine...seriously, the silly acronyms need to stop already) can be outfitted with a number of different weapons on his arms, legs, torso, and even his head. A forehead-mounted chainsaw makes a head-butt lethal, while a leg-mounted machine gun...well, that just sounds sort of lame no matter what. Still, it's a very nice feature.

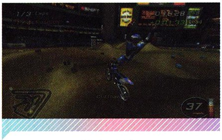
But you know there's a catch. As you struggle your way through the game's handful of boxed-in fighting arenas and long corridors, lose one duel and you'll be teleported back to the first floor of the tower. Not so bad, right? After all, you can just warp back to whatever floor you happened to be on during your untimely demise. Of course, you'll do so armed with nothing but your fists and a prayer, since every time you lose, you drop all of your hard-earned weapons.

As if the monotonous gameplay weren't enough, the whole dropping-weapons thing makes the experience downright sadistic. *Rengoku*'s battle system is clunky at the best of times (read: when you're armed to the teeth), but when you're fighting hand to hand, it's pretty much useless.

So this makes it official: The *Rengoku* series is stillborn. And please, we don't need a *Rengoku III* (*Shot Through the H.E.A.R.T.?*). If you already played the first game, you're getting more of the same here. If you never played the first game—well, congratulations. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT A sorry sequel that does nothing to atone for the sins of the first game.

SCORE 2|10



MTX: MOTOTRAX

A SOLID MIDPACKER

PUB. Activision DEV. Left Field Productions
ESRB T MSRP $29.99

It's hard to write a review for *MTX: Mototrax*. Not because it was painful to play. Not because I'm at a loss for words. And not even because I couldn't find the charger for my PSP.

No, an *MTX: Mototrax* review is hard to write because the game is so spectacularly average. It doesn't do anything particularly wrong—though there are some definite ruts in the track here and there—nor does it do anything that helps it stand out from the already overcrowded pack of racing titles on the PSP. It just kind of...is.

On the plus side, *MTX* features a goodly amount of racing and alternative events. The trick mode is kind of fun, the freeride sections have a vaguely *Tony Hawk*-ish feel to them, and the straight racing is about as good as you'll find on two wheels for the PSP. The graphics are passable, and the framerate is solid at all times. You can even get a bit of wireless multiplayer action going (ad hoc only).

But a lot of the game's good is undone by poor design choices and other random weirdness out on the track. The biggest problem in this old racer's eyes is the ridiculous rider limit. Each event only features four competitors, including you, making the track feel basically empty. Which is very wrong—motocross racing is all about the congestion and action all over the place.

The second major gripe I have is with the AI and how completely inconsistent it can be. During some races, you'll be battling tooth and nail every dirt-covered step of the way just to finish in the top three. Then there are other times where you swear you're running on the Special Olympics setting; you'll be a good half-lap ahead of your competition before you even complete the first circuit.

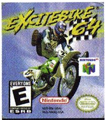
Mototrax starts out with the holeshot thanks to the solid gameplay, but it manages to take a spill before ever reaching the finish line. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT An otherwise solid racer that manages to be disappointing despite its virtues.

SCORE 5|10

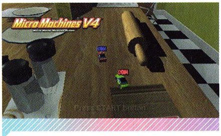
FAST TALKIN'

Older gamers will remember Micro Machines as the smaller-than-anything toys fast-talkin' pitchman John Moschitta used to pimp on us every Saturday morning. Old-school nerds will also remember him as the voice of the superirritating Transformer, Blurr.



OUT OF LEFT FIELD

A bit of trivia for you virtual dirt-trackers: The first motocross game ever released by *MTX* developer Left Field Productions was the critically acclaimed *Excitebike 64* on the Nintendo 64 console.



MICRO MACHINES V4

THE WORLD'S CHEAPEST GARAGE

PUB. Codemasters DEV. Supersonic Software
ESRB E MSRP $29.99

Micro Machines V4 has one thing going for it—major creativity. Everything from the unique weapons you can attach to your miniscule machines to tracks that seem like they were lifted directly from the mind of a 4-year-old (and I mean that in a good way) keep the game true to the product. After all, Micro Machines are made for an audience that's too young to drive, but too old to swallow one and choke to death. Or something like that.

The irritating part is that, judging by the degree of difficulty most players will have with simply running midpack during most events, the game is actually aimed at a much older crowd. There's absolutely no way your average youngster is going to get very far in this game when the level of precision shown by the AI cars is at the superhuman level near the very beginning of the career mode.

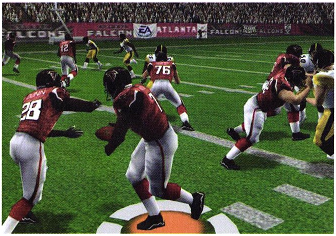
The rewards aren't nearly worth the effort, either. While there are literally hundreds of Micro Machines to find and collect within the game, the simplistic visuals—along with the fact that, hey, you're collecting Micro Machines—mean it's ultimately something that no one but the most die-hard toddler is going to actually care about.

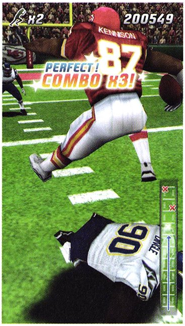
It's too bad, too, because the multiplayer mode, where you get to bet pink slips, would be so much cooler if you actually gave a damn about your collection of minuscule cars. It should be noted, too, that *V4* on the PSP features the same single-controller multiplayer modes found in the console versions, where two players can actually compete on the same PSP at the same time with no extra peripherals or copies of the game.

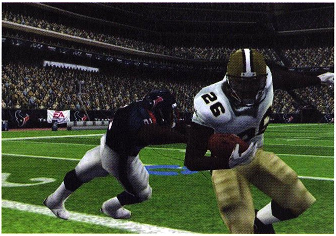
The *Micro Machines* games have stayed the same over the last decade for the most part, so fans of the series will have a general idea of what they're getting into here. Newcomers can consider themselves warned. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT The exact same game as the recent PlayStation 2 version, with all the same great features and irritating problems.

SCORE 3|10







The PSP-exclusive end-to-end minigame prompts you to turn your PSP 90 degrees counterclockwise, pick teams, and then return kickoffs. Stringing together combos to get in the end zone gives you the juice to unlock historical teams and music tracks. At least we don't have to pay for those. Yet.

PUB. EA Sports DEV. EA Tiburon ESRB E MSRP $39.99

MADDEN NFL 07

THIS YEAR, THEY DID IT RIGHT

If you spent much time playing *Madden*'s unbearably slow-loading PSP debut a year ago, you likely had a theory of your own as to when the game would crash—after interceptions, after saving Week 2 in franchise mode, if it was raining on a Tuesday. Thankfully, that horror now lives in the past.

The same tight controls introduced by EA Tiburon in *NCAA Football* PSP—L button used with face buttons in lieu of a right analog—plus the revolutionary Lead Block feature, which allows you to take control of a fullback or offensive lineman prior to the snap, give PSP players a greatly improved football experience versus last year's debut. An advanced set of jukes (using the Triangle button to trigger moves) tailored to the skill/style of the runner more accurately depicts the NFL ground game. The running issue/glitch that plagued *NCAA Football*'s debut on the PSP—where the ball was spotted incorrectly on run plays, always in favor of the defense—has been remedied.

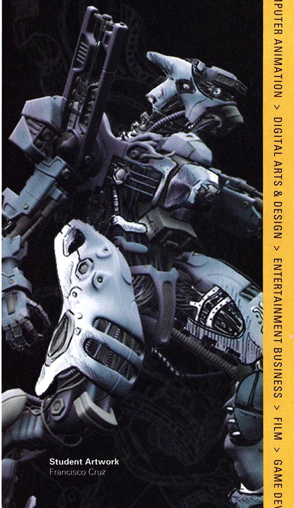
Madden PSP serves as the perfect companion to *Madden* on the PS2 (especially if you use public transportation). The PS2 link lets you take your franchise anywhere your PSP can go. I started one with future Hall of Famer and interception machine Brett Favre and the Packers. I found myself enjoying the less important games (lame Lions, party-boat Vikings) on the PSP, but then I would save the Bears game at Lambeau Field for the PS2 and a bigger screen. One thing surprising is that *Madden* doesn't have that FAQ button on the menu screen (like in *NCAA*) helping to differentiate between PSP and console controls.

It's become almost redundant to talk about EA Sports games looking good on the PSP, but *Madden* well replicates the helmet shine, plus wear and tear on the field seen on the PS2. Some might see it as scaled down because of no funky Superstar mode, but with a Franchise Mode and the PS2 link, you'll be engaged in the NFL on your PSP well into the new year. | *Patrick Mauro*

WHAT I'D LIKE TO SEE Conditions like altitude and time zone having more of an impact on the players and their performances.

SCORE 8|10

ONE OF THE
TOP FIVE
GAME-DEGREE
PROGRAMS
– *Electronic Gaming Monthly*



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[**David Alan Basche, Ben Sliney**]

UNITED 93

IN MEMORIAM

by John Scalzi

***United 93* has the** dubious distinction of being the first major studio film to look at the events of 9/11, which means that it's the film nobody thought they wanted; it was widely reported that, when previews of the film were screened in New York City, people shouted, "Too soon!" at the screen. It's a fair argument whether or not five years really is too soon to start depicting 9/11 on film, but what I think people were recoiling from was the idea of the stark events of 9/11 being turned into Hollywood melodrama. This scar on the national psyche deserves better than to be an excuse for emotional exploitation.

Luckily, *United 93* director Paul Greengrass felt exactly the same way. And because of this, Greengrass handles the story of this doomed flight astonishingly well. He does it by offering a version of the story almost entirely untouched by big-movie artifice—Greengrass is best known to us here in the U.S. for handling a big budget in *The Bourne Supremacy*, but he cut his directorial teeth on intimate, tightly focused dramas in the U.K., armed with handheld cameras and a vérité style.

That training shows here: *United 93* unspools almost like a documentary, following the events on the plane and the events in the air traffic controller command rooms. None of the actors are familiar names or faces; some of the air traffic controllers were real controllers who were working on that fateful day. There's almost nothing between the events of the day and the viewer; it genuinely hurts the heart to see the movie move toward its tragic, heroic conclusion.

I can't tell you if *United 93* is a great film. But I will say that *United 93* is the right film. It's the only possible way to tell this story. See it.

SCORE 9|10

CURIOUS GEORGE

Will Ferrell, Drew Barrymore

As far as I can tell, there are two demographics for this movie: kids under five years of age, and college kids absolutely baked out of their minds. The movie will work for both more or less for the same reasons: bright primary colors, a simple and silly plot, an inoffensive soundtrack by Jack Johnson, and, of course, the fact that George is, like, totally a happy monkey. How can a child/stoned philosophy major not like that? Everyone else: eh.

SCORE 6|10

THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS: TOKYO DRIFT

Lucas Black, Sung Kang

In *Tokyo Drift*, the *Fast and the Furious* franchise has devolved to the point where not only is Vin Diesel unnecessary, so is Paul Walker. You don't even deserve Paul Walker, people. Is that contempt? Or merely a determination that all you really want are shiny cars going fast, and who cares about humans? In which case, why not just see *Cars*?

The big deal in this particular film is that it's no longer enough for the cars in question to go fast; now they "drift," doing that slippy, slidey sideways thing that can't be good for the tires. The film takes place in Tokyo for no discernible reason. One expects the next film in the series will be called *Paris Retreat*, in which all the driving is done backward. I can wait for that a long time.

SCORE 5|10

DOWN IN THE VALLEY

Edward Norton, Evan Rachel Wood

Edward Norton plays a creep in that way that only Edward Norton can play a creep, which is to say you know he's a creep but you still really, really want to like him. Adding to his creepiness this time around is his relationship with a too-young girl who is fascinated by him, or at the very least by the image he projects, and doesn't quite realize what a threat he might represent. Hope your own (future) teenage daughter never meets someone like him.

SCORE 7|10

LUCKY NUMBER SLEVIN

Josh Hartnett, Lucy Liu

Another one of those gangster films that wants you to admire how clever it is, largely by pointing out how clever it is at most available opportunities. Well, fine: It's clever. But clever isn't the same as good. Good doesn't have to wink and nod at you to get you to appreciate it. When you're done with this film, you'll know you've been in the company of talented folk, but you'll have to take their word for it. The movie is just sort of there.

SCORE 6|10

STAY ALIVE

Sophia Bush, Jon Foster

It's not just movies based on videogames that are irretrievably stupid. Movies in which videogames are major plot points are also irretrievably stupid. Case in point: *Stay Alive*, in which dumb teens are offed in the real world in ways similar to how they are offed in a particular videogame. Which leads you think: How did they beta test this game? It will also lead you to think: No videogame in the world is as moronic as this. It should, anyway.

SCORE 2|10

MOVIE RELEASES

September 5
United 93

September 12
Lucky Number Slevin
The Wild

September 19
Stay Alive

September 26
Curious George
Down in the Valley
The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift
The Lake House
The Notorious Bettie Page

THE LAKE HOUSE

Keanu Reeves, Sandra Bullock

Two lovelorn folks become pen pals thanks to a magic mailbox that allows them to write to each other even though they are separated in time by a few years. Yeah, it's a pretty dippy idea, and since the players here are Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock, you can't count on the acting to carry it over either. But you know what? It pretty much works. Look, it's a date film. You could use a date, no? Well, OK, then.

SCORE 7|10

THE NOTORIOUS BETTIE PAGE

Gretchen Mol, Lili Taylor

Back in the day when you couldn't type the word "goatse" into Google and see pornography that would mentally scar you, gals like Bettie Page were considered racy because they dressed up in leather and brandished cute little whips. Ah, those were the innocent days, and as this film hints, Page herself was something of an innocent—who happened to take dirty pictures. Surprisingly sweet and sad. (P.S. Really, don't type "goatse" into Google.)

SCORE 8|10

THE WILD

Kiefer Sutherland, Eddie Izzard

Another example of why Disney so desperately needed to buy Pixar and let its people run Disney's animation department, this flick is so derivative of *Madagascar* that it's a miracle DreamWorks Animation honcho Jeffrey Katzenberg didn't sue Disney—again!—for his share of the profits. The animals in *The Wild* are somewhat more realistic looking than the *Madagascar* animals, which makes the film creepy. Creepy and derivative! Not good adjectives.

SCORE 5|10

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REPLAY

REVVING UP THE PLAYSTATION WAYBACK MACHINE

98

PSX

A LOOK BACK AT SONY'S ILL-FATED ALL-IN-ONE DEVICE

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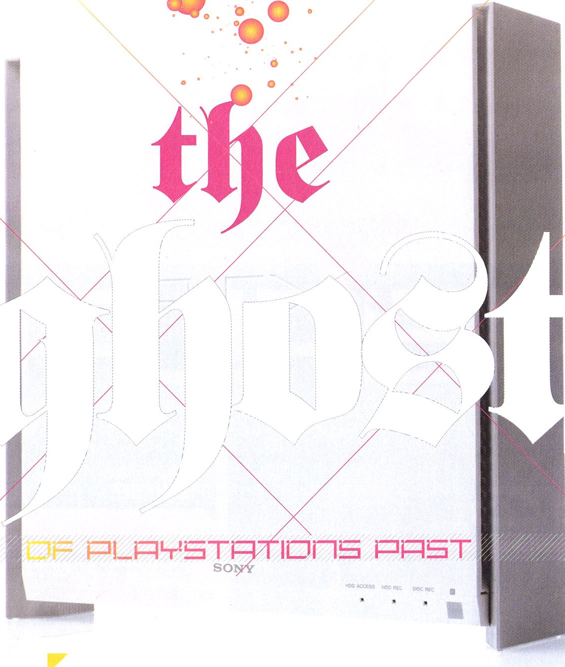
the ghost OF PLAYSTATIONS PAST


SONY
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DISC REC

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO THE PSX, SONY'S ALL-IN-ONE ENTERTAINMENT CENTER? AND WILL IT HAUNT THE PS3?

I/⏻
⏏
SONY
DESR-5000

Imagine a single device at the center of your home theater, doing everything. One box to rule them all! It's the dream of hardcore consumer-electronics junkies—and the occasional lazy bastard who just doesn't want to wire a billion components together. Imagine it, though. Jamming on *Guitar Hero II* for the billionth straight hour, you suddenly remember: "Oh, crap! I wanted to record that new episode of *The Venture Bros.*!" No problem—just open up a menu and set your PlayStation to record the show. That was the promise behind the PSX.

"THE PS-WHAAAAAAAA?"

Don't remember the PSX? We don't blame you. It never even hit store shelves here in the United States. The short version: This pimped-out PS2 housed a web browser, DVD recorder, and DVR. The long version reads like a geek's wet dream.

The PSX was a game console—that's a given. It also attempted to be a central media hub for your home. It promised progressive-scan DVD output, better than the native PS2 playback, and a 250GB hard drive for storing shows recorded through the built-in TV tuner. Plug in your Handycam and start editing video on the PSX. Create slideshows with music and photos stored on the hard drive. Upload recordings and music to a PSP. So what happened?

"In certain ways, the PSX was ahead of its time in terms of AV convergence," says Daichi Yamafuji, Sony Corporation's associate manager of corporate communications. That's one way of putting it. For all the things it looked to do right, a number of problems plagued the supersystem from the start.

MONEY TALKS...

In December of 2003, Sony released this überbox in Japan for the low, low price of 99,800 yen. That's roughly $900. A slightly more price-conscious version sold for about $720. Still, though: Ooooffff! No matter how you slice it, that's a lot of money.

The reason it was so expensive was a simple matter of cramming so much bleeding-edge hardware into a single device. "The idea was there," says gaming-industry analyst David Cole, "but probably the biggest problem is that all the components that went into the PSX—the DVD recorder, DVR, you name it—have all come down in price." Cole quickly points to the DVD player. When they first came out, a box cost over $1,000. Now, you can buy one in your grocery store for 50 bucks.

"THE PSX WAS AHEAD OF ITS TIME IN TERMS OF AV CONVERGENCE."

Because of the high price of entry, only the core early adopter bought into the PSX. "But," says Cole, "it didn't catch on with the mass consumer market—Sony's true target demographic. As opposed

THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

A LOOK BACK AT SOME OF SONY'S BIGGER FORMAT SUCCESSES—AND FLOPS

BETAMAX: The infamous videotape-format wars of the early 1980s left Sony with stacks of unsold players. Betamax tapes, while superior to VHS tapes, were pricey, and only Sony made the expensive playback decks.

3.5-INCH FLOPPY DISKS: Remember those little things you used to insert into the computer? Little plastic squares that held a whole 1.44MB of data...oh, who are we kidding? You barely remember CD-ROMs. Young punks.

VIDEO8: When Sony sold the first Handycam in 1985, it created a smaller tape to fit the tiny camcorder—and gave birth to a popular format.

MINIDISC: While popular among the DJ set before MP3 players hit the scene, MiniDisc players never really caught on outside of Japan.

DVD: That's right. Not many realize this, but Sony and Philips jointly developed this now-ubiquitous technology.

MEMORY STICK: Cameras, camcorders, PDAs, the PSP—even some TVs have the company-sanctioned slot. If Sony really wanted to push the format, though, why didn't it make it the standard memory card for the PS2 when the console launched?

ATRAC/ATRAC3: Sony excreted this draconian copy-protected digital audio format. Sure, it sounds good. However, it locks down audio files on your computer and stubbornly refuses to work with Apple's AAC audio (iTunes, anyone?) or MP3s. Sony's SonicStage software lets you convert MP3s to ATRAC, but why would you?

UNIVERSAL MEDIA DISC (UMD): Y'know, for something to be universal, it needs to work on more devices than just the PSP. Do we need to make any jokes about how much Hollywood loves the UMD format right now? Didn't think so.

BLU-RAY DISCS (BD): Blu-ray, HD-DVD: Welcome to the Terrordome! The new format wars are about to begin, and Sony is pushing the BD technology into the PS3. Technically, Blu-ray discs are superior—but, as with Betamax, the decks to play them cost a lot more. The significant distinction: Sony isn't the only company making BD players.

BETAMAX

MINIDISC

UMD

to the 100-plus million people who made the previous two PlayStation systems so popular, Sony was catering to high-end users."

TKO

It takes more than dollars...er...yen to scare some people away. A few technical issues made it even tougher to sell everyone on the all-in-one box. For starters, it wouldn't support CD-R discs or MP3s. That may not seem like a big deal, but the PSX only played Sony's proprietary ATRAC audio format. So, basically, if you owned an iPod or a stack of MP3 CDs, the show was over. Video nerds turned off to the lack of DivX/XviD support. Sadly, that was nothing new for Sony. From the beginning, the company has always taken pretty significant chances on new proprietary audio and video formats. Some succeed—some don't. (Check out our handy field guide to Sony's electronic-elephant graveyard, above.)

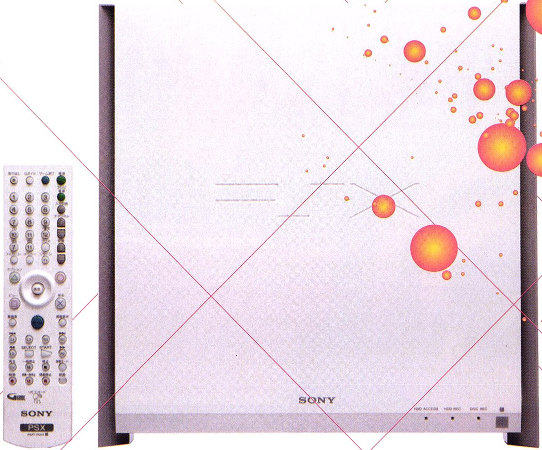
Sony's hopes of selling the PSX dried up. Even though Sony denies it ("The target audience for the PSX was the Japanese market, because of space constraints in the typical Japanese home," says Yamafuji), alleged plans to ship the PSX internationally in late 2004 crept into 2005. Then, nothing. Clearly, the poor sales in Japan weren't encouraging signs for the rest of the world.

THE PS3X

Nevertheless, though the PSX failed, it did spark a few ideas within Sony R&D. The PSX's command-bar interface, which you've since seen on the PSP (and some new high-end Sony TVs), is being adopted companywide—it's how you'll navigate the PS3.

> THOUGH THE PSX FAILED, IT DID SPARK A FEW IDEAS WITHIN SONY R&D.

The "Sony Online" Internet service introduced in Japan for the PSX allows users to download videos, music, and various bits to enhance the consoles video-editing capabilities. While Sony hasn't revealed its online strategy for the PS3, some speculation is pointing to the PSX-based service as a first step. Heck, there's even some wild



PSX

speculation that the PSX will work in tandem with the PS3—but at press time, Sony spokespeople have neither confirmed nor denied this rumor.

Still, though, Sony insists on courting the high-end consumer. By far the biggest gamble is including a Blu-ray disc (BD) player in the PS3. This alone jacks up the price of the machine—most dedicated BD players coming to store shelves sell for around $1,000. It makes the PS3 the most affordable Blu-ray player for the early adopters, sure, but it effectively prices out the mainstream consumer. Cole agrees: "[The] PSX should cause [Sony] to focus. The gaming and Blu-ray markets are two very separate markets right now."

But before you start worrying that the PS3 will go the way of the PSX, remember: The PS2 was a significant force in the widespread adoption of DVDs. While the format was launched in 1997, by 2000—before the PS2 launched with its built-in DVD player—worldwide DVD sales had just barely hit the 300 million mark; by 2001 sales had more than doubled to 625 million. And, according to Sony, 46 percent of PS2 owners say the PS2 was the first DVD player they owned. In fact, according to the research companies Screen Digest and IDC, before the launch of the PS2, industry analysts were seriously questioning whether the DVD format would ever take off. Sound familiar?

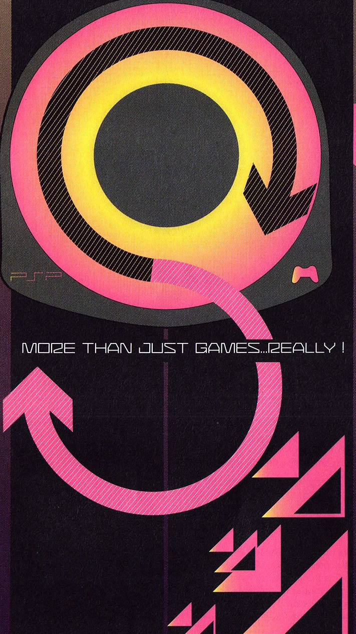
CONVERGENCE, EVER?

Trying to be something for everybody, the PSX became the master of none. Some electronic Boot Hill houses landfills of similar failed experiments and all-in-one home theater wannabes. Whether it's a convertible console (the Coleco Adam) or a multimedia machine (Panasonic's 3DO), the perfect mix of form and function has yet to be found. The PSX joins that big scrap heap in the sky of also-rans. However, it makes you wonder if companies can learn from their mistakes—and if maybe, one day, there can be a single solution to everyone's needs. Will it be the PS3? | *Darren Gladstone*

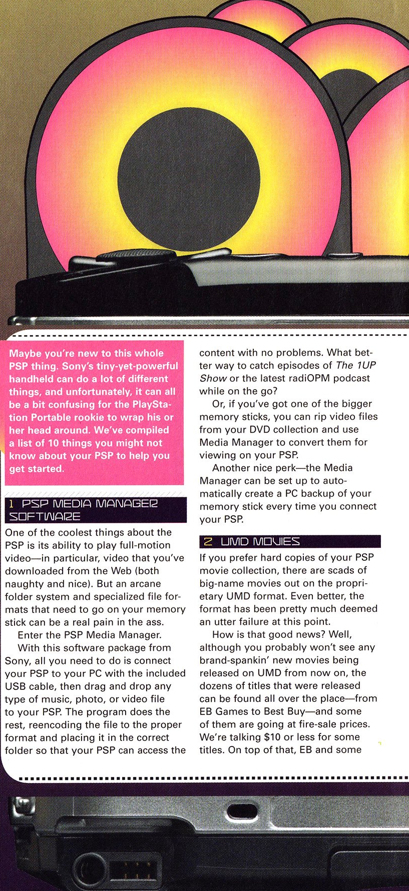
> THE PS2 WAS A SIGNIFICANT FORCE IN THE WIDESPREAD ADOPTION OF DVDS.

10

THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR PSP



MORE THAN JUST GAMES...REALLY!



Maybe you're new to this whole PSP thing. Sony's tiny-yet-powerful handheld can do a lot of different things, and unfortunately, it can all be a bit confusing for the PlayStation Portable rookie to wrap his or her head around. We've compiled a list of 10 things you might not know about your PSP to help you get started.

1 PSP MEDIA MANAGER SOFTWARE

One of the coolest things about the PSP is its ability to play full-motion video—in particular, video that you've downloaded from the Web (both naughty and nice). But an arcane folder system and specialized file formats that need to go on your memory stick can be a real pain in the ass.

Enter the PSP Media Manager.

With this software package from Sony, all you need to do is connect your PSP to your PC with the included USB cable, then drag and drop any type of music, photo, or video file to your PSP. The program does the rest, reencoding the file to the proper format and placing it in the correct folder so that your PSP can access the content with no problems. What better way to catch episodes of *The 1UP Show* or the latest radiOPM podcast while on the go?

Or, if you've got one of the bigger memory sticks, you can rip video files from your DVD collection and use Media Manager to convert them for viewing on your PSP.

Another nice perk—the Media Manager can be set up to automatically create a PC backup of your memory stick every time you connect your PSP.

2 UMD MOVIES

If you prefer hard copies of your PSP movie collection, there are scads of big-name movies out on the proprietary UMD format. Even better, the format has been pretty much deemed an utter failure at this point.

How is that good news? Well, although you probably won't see any brand-spankin' new movies being released on UMD from now on, the dozens of titles that were released can be found all over the place—from EB Games to Best Buy—and some of them are going at fire-sale prices. We're talking $10 or less for some titles. On top of that, EB and some

other retailers sell used copies of movies as well.

3 MEMORY STICK DUO ENTERTAINMENT PACKS

Keeping on the subject of movies, Sony Pictures and Sony Electronics are putting out yet another product soon that will help you with your movie watching needs. The 1GB and 2GB Memory Stick Duo Entertainment Packs will come complete with a memory stick and a DVD that houses one of four PSP-optimized movies: *Hitch*, *S.W.A.T.*, *The Grudge*, or *xXx: State of the Union*.

Honestly, the movies included aren't all that exciting. The nice part is the 1GB and 2GB sticks that are included. All that space for $60 or $100, respectively, is a decent deal.

4 LOCATIONFREE TV

The ultimate multimedia functions of your PSP can be connected to a LocationFree Base Station ($279.99). With this funky little unit, you can access your home network from just about anywhere via Wi-Fi and stream just about any kind of media you want, from a live broadcast of *Lost* right from your cable box to all those MP3s you've got sitting on your PC at home. This is the toy for the boys with lots of cash to burn.

5 INTERNET BROWSING

If a cheap, wireless router is more your speed for all of your home networking needs, the PSP has you covered there, too. The constantly evolving PSP web browser has slowly become a respectable way to surf the Net. Tabs, bookmarks, and other fairly standard features on PC browsers have recently been joined by Macromedia Flash compatibility, as well as support for...

6 RSS FEEDS

This is one of the best functions Sony ever added to the PSP. Now, just like you can do with an iPod, you can set your PSP to check various RSS feeds for audio and video podcasts every time you connect to your network.

One of the most recent system firmware updates actually modified the RSS support a bit, allowing you to save audio and video content directly to your memory card rather than having to stay connected to the network while you listen to your favorite podcast.

7 FIRMWARE UPGRADES

Speaking of firmware upgrades, that's something else you should constantly be checking for while connected to a network. Sony frequently updates the operating system for the PSP, adding all-new features, new functionality, or even changing the overall look and feel of the interface.

A lot of the stuff is pretty transparent, though, so don't expect each new update to move worlds or anything. For instance, one of the features in the recent 2.80 firmware update was that the system now displays video at the correct resolution when an external tuner is selected in LocationFree TV. Riveting.

8 CHEAP GAMES

Enough of this multimedia junk. You bought your PSP to play games, right? And now it's cheaper than ever to do so, thanks to Sony's extending the Greatest Hits program to the PlayStation Portable.

As of late July, five games have been added to the Greatest Hits list: *Ape Escape: On the Loose*, *ATV Offroad Fury: Blazin' Trails*, *Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee*, *Twisted Metal: Head-On*, and *Wipeout Pure*. Take it from us: *Hot Shots* and *Wipeout* are two of the best games on PSP. At $19.99 a pop, you'd be crazy not to buy them.

9 FREE GAMES!

OK, we're not talking about free games in the strictest sense of the term here, but Sony has started offering a lot of downloadable demos for the PSP lately. Check out *LocoRoco*, *Go! Sudoku*, or *World Tour Soccer*. Hopefully, every major PSP release will start getting a decent free demo a month or so before its street date.

Oh, and you don't need a wireless network to get these demos, either. Just plug your PSP into your PC and use your wired connection to download and transfer the files you need.

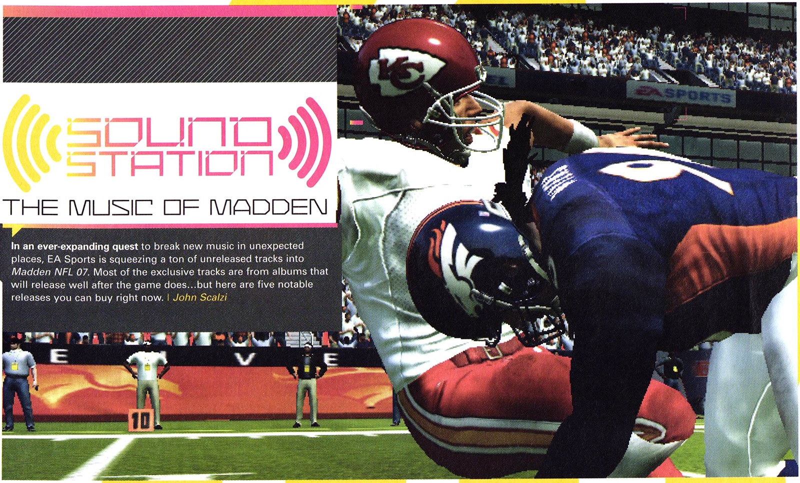
10 MORE FREE STUFF!

Recently, Sony started awarding folks who downloaded and played through the *LocoRoco* demo. Folks with demo version 1.01 got a password at the end of the level, which they could then input at the PlayStation.com site for rewards such as free backgrounds, sound files, and so on. Free stuff rocks—and hopefully, Sony will continue to dole out rewards just for playing PSP games. | *Greg Sewart*

SOUND STATION

THE MUSIC OF MADDEN

In an ever-expanding quest to break new music in unexpected places, EA Sports is squeezing a ton of unreleased tracks into *Madden NFL 07*. Most of the exclusive tracks are from albums that will release well after the game does...but here are five notable releases you can buy right now. | *John Scalzi*



CARTEL
CHROMA

CARTEL: CHROMA

My general rule about any branch of punk, even the denatured version of pop-punk that exists today, is that it shouldn't be performed by a band that sounds like my 7-year-old daughter could totally kick its collective candy ass. On *Chroma*, Cartel is *that* band: decent tunes and harmonies but a total lack of threat and bite, and a lead singer who's probably too sweet for *emo*. This is rock by stuffed animals: plushie pop-punk. My kid's opening a can of whup ass, boys.

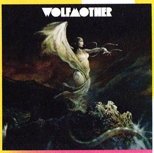
SCORE: 5|10

KEANE
UNDER
THE
IRON
SEA

KEANE: UNDER THE IRON SEA

If you've been asking yourself, "Hey, what would Coldplay sound like if Chris Martin's testicles never dropped?" the answer awaits you in this album. Keane has that swirly, swoony Brit thing down to the proverbial science, pumping out tuneage that's useful for guys who want to prove to women that they're all sensitive and brooding, despite all evidence to the contrary. Basically, this is Bread for the 21st century. Go ask your mom who Bread was. Then try to contain your horrified screams.

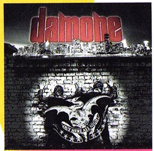
SCORE: 6|10



WOLFMOTHER: WOLFMOTHER

Amazing. It's like the members of Wolfmother spent their entire lives in a bomb shelter where the music collection was curated by a mad metal stoner who decided that there was no point in documenting the progression of rock 'n' roll after *Physical Graffiti*. Also, the only reading material consisted of *Gor* novels and three copies of *Chariots of the Gods*. The result: everything you could possibly love about '70s metal and hard rock jammed into one economy-sized package. Original? Not a chance. Good? Damn straight.

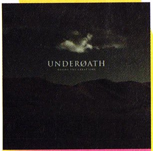
SCORE: 8|10



DAMONE: OUT HERE ALL NIGHT

Out Here All Night starts off like a rocket with "Now is the Time," which is just the sort of the punk-pop anthem that deserves to be blasted out of stereos loudly enough to shatter windows and deafen neighborhood pets. The rest of the album cruises a bit below that initial high point but is still nice and tasty, with lead singer Noelle LeBlanc spitting out attitude in fine Joan Jett tradition. Also, any band that offers up a ginchy acoustic version of Iron Maiden's "Wasted Years" deserves a listen.

SCORE: 7.5|10



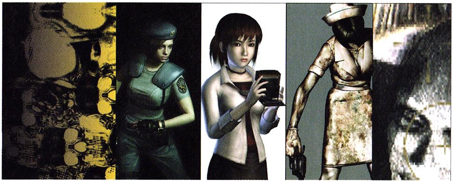
UNDEROATH: DEFINE THE GREAT LINE

On *Line*, Underoath tries to leaven the paint-peeling sonic attack of hardcore screamy metal with occasional stabs at melody and, you know, singing. Does it work? After listening to it once, I thought not. Subsequent listening has it working for me, although things get awfully pretentious at times (cf. the spoken-word nonsense of "Salmarnir"). No matter what, however, this is a pretty dark and heavy affair all the way through. So if you're all about the dark and heavy, enjoy.

SCORE: 7|10

HEAD TO HEAD

THE BIG THREE OF SURVIVAL HORROR IN A HALLOWEEN SMACKDOWN!



SERIES	RESIDENT EVIL	FATAL FRAME	SILENT HILL	WINNER
SETTING	Raccoon City, home to the mustache-twirling Umbrella Corporation	Eerily realistic residences in Japan	The scenic resort town of Silent Hill	Fatal Frame
ENEMIES	Zombies	Ghosts	Creatures from your most twisted f***ing nightmares	Silent Hill
MAIN CHARACTERS	Cops (and a cop's sister)	Waifish Japanese girls	Average guys and/or girls, just like you—only more delusional	Fatal Frame
MEMORABLE QUOTE	"Jill, here is a lockpick. It might be handy if you, the master of unlocking, take it with you."	"Doooon't be scaaaaared!"	"Huh. Radio. What's going on with that radio?"	Resident Evil
MOST DISTURBING MOMENT	*Resident Evil*: Dogs. Windows. Enough said.	*Fatal Frame II*: Laughing girl atop pile of corpses	*Silent Hill 2*: Pyramid Head has his way with leggy monsters	Silent Hill
MOST FRUSTRATING MOMENT	Finding the crest to open the door to get the gem that goes into the statue that opens…	Realizing you're a pussy who can't play with the lights out	Beating the game and still having no clue what the hell just happened	Fatal Frame
MOST DESIRABLE OBJECT	Braaains	Exit door	The chainsaw—oh god, yes, the chainsaw	Silent Hill
COULD BE IMPROVED BY...	Releasing an *Outbreak* that doesn't suck	Setting future games in America. *U.S.A.! U.S.A.!*	Telling us what the hell just happened	Fatal Frame
WINNER	FATAL FRAME			

PS1-DERLAND

THE VOCAL MAJORITY

BY JEREMY PARISH

When he's not trying to reclaim his vanished youth with obsolete games, Jeremy works as 1UP.com's features editor and charming mascot. Check out his blog at toastyfrog.1UP.com.

Once upon a time, videogame characters were quiet fellows, content to stomp evil mushrooms or collect shiny golden rings with mute determination. Then along came the optical-media revolution. Suddenly, everything changed. Suddenly, the heroes had access to the deadliest weapon of all: vocal cords. And they weren't afraid to use them. In fact, some of them refused to stop.

For gamers who had come to think of their onscreen avatars as obedient drones ready to take orders with a minimum of sass, the PlayStation marked a new era of mouthiness that was off-putting in both its volume and its complete lack of quality.

Granted, Sony's was hardly the first system to feature chatty characters, but jabbering mascots had previously been rarities thanks to the strict memory limits imposed by the cartridge format of older systems. (And—mercifully, in the case of mouthy goons like Bubsy the Bobcat—easily ignored rarities at that.) Neither was the PlayStation the first system to support optical media, a format that made possible all manner of virtual verbal spew. CD-i, 3DO, Sega CD, Turbo CD, even the primitive LaserActive: They all beat Sony to the punch with shiny little high-capacity data platters that offered a hundred times the capacity of most carts. Once memory conservation ceased to be an issue, developers got a little carried away, drunk with the power of laserdiscs and CD-ROMs.

THE PLAYSTATION MARKED A NEW ERA OF MOUTHINESS.

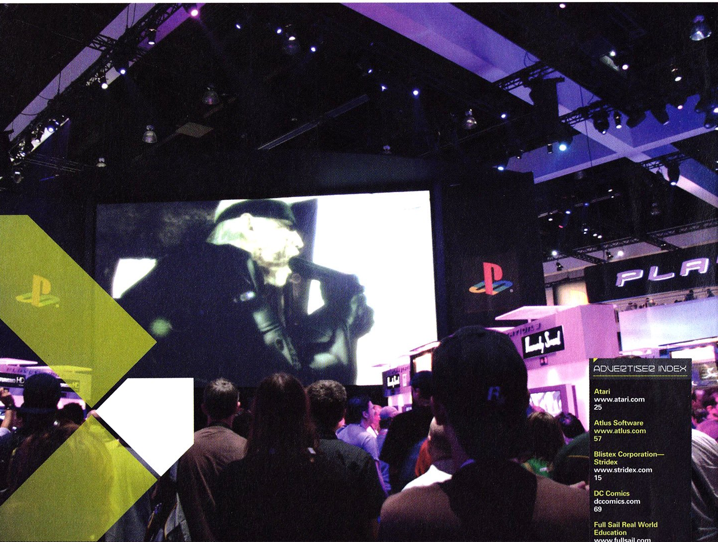
That was a dark time for gaming, an unhappy age of pain called "Siliwood." Ill-conceived stories were given horrible scripts, acted out poorly by disinterested actors. A hint of sub-*Pong* interactivity was shoehorned into the works later. Siliwood-style full-motion videogames patterned themselves after *Dragon's Lair* and its ilk, except that they featured grainy footage of real washed-up actors on real cheap sets instead of lush Don Bluth animation. Translation: They really sucked.

Luckily, gamers are rarely content to wallow in someone else's filth, and by the time the PlayStation rolled around, Siliwood had run its course. FMV was still around, but it had been relegated to serve as an expensive bookend to something more like real videogames. Meanwhile, voice acting gained an even more prominent role, often being dubbed atop actual honest-to-god gameplay... much to our ears' regret.

See, while the quality of video content seen on the PlayStation was a marked improvement over the likes of *Night Trap* and *Mad Dog McCree*, the quality of the acting generally wasn't. Developers got it half right in realizing that multimedia content worked best as an enhancement for gameplay rather than a replacement. But they were somehow much slower to catch on to the fact that jarring, awkward voice acting is far worse than no voice acting at all.

The mangled dialogue in games like *Resident Evil*, *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* and *Mega Man 8* are pretty much the stuff of legend these days. Gaming made enormous strides toward becoming a respected art form during the 32-bit age, but all that stilted narration surely set the cause back a few years.

"I hope this is not...*Chris*' blood!" Barry Burton intoned woodenly in his Raccoon City debut. No worries, Barry. That pool of blood was from our tortured eardrums, abused by one too many of the PlayStation's miserable piles of vocal tracks. I



JOE RYBICKI attended his first E3 in 1997. It was in Atlanta, it was damn hot, and it was like nothing he'd ever seen. You never forget your first time. Send your thoughts on the death of E3 to opm@ziffdavis.com.

IN MY DAY...

DEAD SHOW WALKING

For some unknown reason, my clearest memory of my first Electronic Entertainment Expo is of a two-story tall model of Croc. Most of you probably don't remember this mascot from the competent, but utterly unremarkable platformer of the same name. And that's OK, because there's absolutely no reason why you should.

But unfathomably, the image of this huge, cartoony crocodile looming over a sea of sweaty game geeks sticks with me. I remember walking into this mass of game-obsessed humanity and thinking, "What. The. Hell." The size, the noise, the spectacle—it was overwhelming. It wasn't long before I started trying to calculate how much all this stuff *cost*. I lost count after the first million.

That was almost 10 years ago, and in that time, those costs have unquestionably skyrocketed. So, while it came as a shock to learn that E3 is basically dead, it really shouldn't have. Publishers have been dropping literally millions of dollars to put together these elaborate booths, set them up, staff them, take 'em down, and feed and house a staff of dozens for a week in L.A. We should have realized that, sooner or later, they would start to question exactly how much of a return they were getting on that investment.

So the Entertainment Software Association has opted to reformat E3 as a "more intimate" show, with attendees numbering in the thousands rather than the tens of thousands. It's an interesting move, and a smart one...*if* the industry continues to show up in force.

For me, it's bittersweet. E3, in its best moments, allowed us to dive headfirst into the very essence of gaming and come out energized and invigorated, excited for the future, like some sort of tent-revival videogame baptism. But the last few years, those feelings of excitement were overshadowed more and more by the frustrations inherent in an event on the scale that E3 had reached. The masses of people made it challenging for us to get hands-on time with the games that captured our interest—if we even had time to hunt them down. And the publishers seemed to exert stricter and stricter controls on what was shown. An event that was once about seeking out diamonds in the rough became a jewelry-store display: You can look at the pretty, shiny things, but you can't touch—at least, not without prior approval, and only under the watchful eye of security.

We'll see if this new, "intimate" format improves that. One thing is certain: E3 as we know it is, at least for now, dead. But don't think that you, the fan, will lose out in this deal. The removal of this monolithic centerpiece of gaming news will undoubtedly lead publishers to show product *throughout the year*. Yes, even in the summer. So while new games will emerge without the spectacle of this grand event, we'll all be getting more substance out of the deal.

The other big benefit to fans is the fact that other gaming and consumer-tech events—like Penny Arcade's PAX and Ziff's own DigitalLife—will undoubtedly grow to pick up some of the E3 slack. And unlike E3, these events are open to the public. You don't have to be an industry insider to get in; you just have to buy a ticket.

So don't be alarmed by E3's demise. It's the end of an era, to be sure...but there's no ending without a new beginning. ❘

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Violence

Coming Soon

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PSP PlayStation Portable

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